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MR. PREEDY AND THE
COUNTESS



MR. PREEDY AND THE COUNTESS

AN ORIGINAL FARCE
IN THREE ACTS

By

R. C. CARTON

*perused
Critchett, R.D.*

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and July 15, 1911.

MR. PREEDY AND THE COUNTESS

First produced at the Criterion Theatre, W., on Tuesday,
April 13, 1909, with the following cast:—

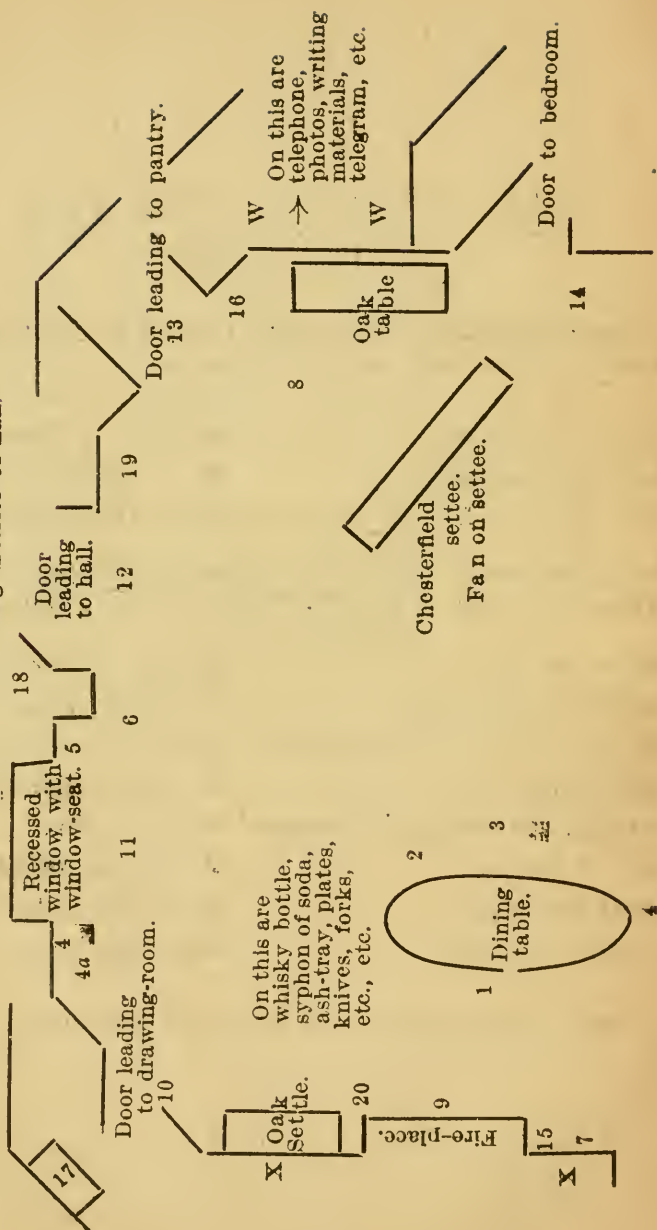
EARL OF KINSLOW	<i>Mr. G. E. Bellamy.</i>
EARL OF RUSHMERE	<i>Mr. G. Davy Burnaby.</i>
HON. ROBERT JENNERWAY	<i>Mr. A. Vane-Tempest.</i>
JOHN BOUNSALL	{ (Partners in the Bounsall Emporium.)
HAMILTON PREEDY	
	<i>Mr. Fred Lewis.</i>
	<i>Mr. Weedon Grossmith.</i>
MR. SIDGRAVE	<i>Mr. Lytton Grey.</i>
REGINALD SAUNDERS	<i>Mr. Walter Pearce.</i>
BILSON (Preedy's Manservant)	<i>Mr. F. Volpé.</i>
CHAUFFEUR	<i>Mr. Claude Edmonds.</i>
JOANNA, COUNTESS OF RUSHMERE	<i>Miss Compton.</i>
MRS. SIDGRAVE	<i>Miss Lydia Rachel.</i>
EMMA SIDGRAVE	<i>Miss Shelley Calton.</i>
HARRIET BUDGEN	<i>Miss Dora Barton.</i>

Time in Representation.—2 hours and 10 minutes.

Back cloth showing
view of opposite flats.

Back cloth

showing interior of hall.



A DINING-ROOM IN A TYPICAL KENSINGTON FLAT.

Parquetry floor.

Carpet oblong (crushed strawberry).

Pictures in oak frames, engravings, etc.

There is a linen blind at window, also small lace curtains.

A pair of curtains at 4 and 5.

Oak panelled wainscot to the height of 6 ft. 6 in.—on this a ledge to carry china and pewter. Oak fireplace. Oak doors.

Casement window with leaded panes.

Four oxydized brackets, each carrying two electric candle fittings and shades. (Two of these brackets are in positions marked X and two in positions marked W, above oak panelling.)

Colour scheme of walls—light cinnamon with darker frieze.

1, 2, 3, 4, chairs; 4a, 6, high-backed oak chairs; 5, jardiniere; 7, small cabinet; 8, arm-chair; 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, black wool rugs; 15, small hearth-brush; 16, paper (waste) basket; 17, inlaid cabinet; 18, hat and umbrella stand; 19, stand on which is vase; 20, club fender.

On mantelshelf are clock, 2 Sheffield plate candlesticks, 2 blue and white vases, letters, etc.

Table R.C. is in Act I covered with white cloth, on which are fruit-dish, finger-bowls, claret jug, sherry decanter, liqueur bottle and glasses, plates, serviettes, etc.

Table R.C. in Acts II and III covered with ordinary table-cloth.

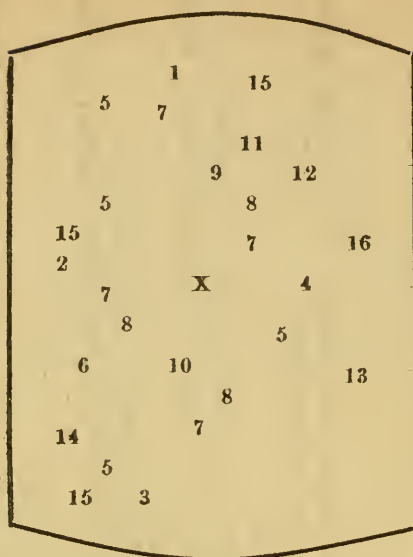
Telegram on oak table. Fan on settee. Tray for Bilson off L.V.E. Rose for Emma. Rose for Preedy.

Box of cigarettes and matches on mantelshelf.

Dinner table at opening of Act I.

MR. SIDGRAVE

EMMA



X Fruit-dish with
a bunch of grapes
and peaches
MRS. SIDGRAVE

PREEDY

1. Plate with dessert knife and fork.
2. " " "
3. " " "
4. " " "
5. Finger-bowls.
6. Sherry decanter.
7. Liqueur glasses.
8. Sherry glasses.
9. Water jug.
10. Liqueur decanter.
11. Claret jug.
12. Small whisky glass.
13. Serviette ring.
14. Ash-tray.
15. Serviettes in rings.
16. Serviette,

MR. PREEDY AND THE COUNTESS

*This Play may on no account be performed by amateurs
in the West End of London.*

ACT I

SCENE.—*The living-room of HAMILTON PREEDY'S
London flat. Time, evening. The flat is furnished
and decorated handsomely and artistically; there
is a small dining-table, at which are seated MR.
MRS. and MISS SIDGRAVE and MR. HAMILTON
PREEDY. The two ladies are seated right and left
of table, the two gentlemen face each other. The
dinner has reached the late dessert stage.)*

TIME.—*The present.*

Laughter and buzz of conversation for rise of curtain.

MRS. SIDGRAVE. (*seated L. of table*) Now, papa,
we've heard that story before. I think, Emma,
we'll leave the gentlemen to their wine. (*rises*)

PREEDY. (*seated at bottom of table. He rises*)
Won't you let me tempt you with a crème de menthe?

MRS. SIDGRAVE. (*smilingly*) No, I thank you

PREEDY. (*putting his chair below fire-place*)

(EMMA, who has been seated R. of table, rises.)

I'm afraid you've made a very poor dinner, Mrs. Sid-
grave. Bachelors' quarters, you know.

MRS. SIDGRAVE. You are too modest, Mr. Preedy. I'm sure everything has been delightful. (c.)

PREEDY. My household sorely lacks feminine supervision. (R.C.)

MRS. SIDGRAVE. (*turning*) At any rate, that disadvantage is not irremediable. Come, Emma, dear.

(EMMA goes up R. to drawing-room door.)

PREEDY. Permit me.

(*He goes to drawing-room door, opens it. The two ladies pass out. PREEDY closes door after them and returns to head of table.*)

(SIDGRAVE, who has been seated at head of table, rises, comes C. to below table, and sits R. of table.)

SIDGRAVE. Well, my dear Preedy, allow me to echo Mrs. Sidgrave's words, as I not infrequently do : charming little meal !

PREEDY. Ah ! my memory travels back to the soup, which seemed to be composed of hot water and black pepper.

SIDGRAVE. Oh no ! An excellent soup.

PREEDY. And one could see by the look of the lamb cutlets that they were sheepish—as they had reason to be. Ah ! well—the claret decanter is at your elbow, Mr. Sidgrave.

SIDGRAVE. Thank you. (*helps himself to wine*)

PREEDY. I forget whether you're a smoker ?

SIDGRAVE. One cigarette after dinner.

PREEDY. Quite so! Allow me. (*fetches cigarettes and matches from mantelshelf*) These are Turkish—these are American.

SIDGRAVE. You're very good. (*takes one*) I have an impulse to raise my glass—as I believe they say in Germany—in celebration of the recent important change in your prospects.

PREEDY. The partnership? (*L. of table above chair*)

SIDGRAVE. The partnership. (*seated R. of table. Lights cigarette*)

PREEDY. It's a—big thing, isn't it?

SIDGRAVE. It is indeed. A partnership in the great Bounsall Emporium! If your late father, towards whom, as you are aware, I stood in the dual relation of friend and legal adviser, could have foreseen that his son would rise to such a very distinguished commercial altitude, he would have been a happy man to-day.

PREEDY. Yes; it's—there's no doubt it's a big thing. (*takes cigarette and lights it*)

SIDGRAVE. Mr. Bounsall, whom I have never had the pleasure of meeting, must be a remarkable man. Napoleonic!

PREEDY. Oh! he is—quite—Napoleonic. He has advanced my interests to a far greater extent than I had any right to expect. There is, in fact, only one disadvantage to my present very gratifying position.

SIDGRAVE. What is that, my dear Hamilton?

PREEDY. I don't mind saying there are times when Mr. Bounsall frightens me out of my socks.

SIDGRAVE. Dear me !

PREEDY. Of course I feel I am only a very junior partner ; and even now when I sit down in Mr. Bounsall's presence, it is always on the edge of the chair. He's been going in a good deal lately for smart society—motoring—horses.

SIDGRAVE. Motoring *and* horses ?

PREEDY. Horse-racing. He has several in training. And yachts—he's at Cowes at this moment. I suppose it'll mean Parliament by and by.

SIDGRAVE. Parliament ?

PREEDY. Yes ; he won't look at the County Council. Of course, his rate of expenditure is very high, even for so wealthy a man. However, Mr. Bounsall, though an interesting topic, was not quite the one I was anxious to discuss with you.

SIDGRAVE. No ? (*looks at PREEDY in an embarrassing manner*)

PREEDY. No. I—er—won't you have a little more claret ?

SIDGRAVE. Not any more, thank you.

PREEDY. As I ventured to point out to Mrs. Sidgrave that my household lacks feminine control, and remembering our happy Sunday evenings in Manchester, I—you are quite sure you won't have a little more claret ? (*offering claret*)

SIDGRAVE. Quite sure. You were saying there was some topic you wished to discuss with me.

PREEDY. Er—yes. In these cases there's nothing for it but reckless audacity. (*sitting L. of table*) Should I be acceptable to you as a future son-in-law?

SIDGRAVE. My dear Hamilton, what you have just said has given to me—and will shortly give to Mrs. Sidgrave—the most affectionate pleasure.

(*Both rise and shake hands across the table.*)

There is no one whom we would so gladly welcome as a son.

(*SIDGRAVE sits again.*)

(*BILSON comes in from pantry. Comes C.*)

PREEDY. You are more than kind, Mr. Sidgrave, and I can only tell you that——

(*BILSON coughs.*)

(*to BILSON*) What is it? I didn't ring.

BILSON. Thought you might like me to clear away.

PREEDY. Not at present. I'm very much occupied.

(*BILSON goes out sulkily into pantry. PREEDY returns to C.*)

SIDGRAVE. Any sudden matter of importance?

PREEDY. (*C.*) Oh no! My man is apt to be a little fidgety. He is honest, industrious, and thoroughly competent, and it will be one of the happiest moments in my life when I can find a suitable reason

for giving him a month's notice. Do you think I may anticipate a favourable response from Emma—Miss Emma?

SIDGRAVE. I see no cause for despondency. Faint heart, you know.

PREEDY. Yes, exactly. I was thinking that possibly you might—break the ice for me. (*returning to top of table R.C.*)

SIDGRAVE. No, my dear fellow. Plead from your own brief. Mrs. Sidgrave and I can remain a final court of appeal. (*rises*) I'll send Emma to you. (*crossing below table to C.*)

PREEDY. What, just after dinner? (*L.C.*)

SIDGRAVE. No time like the present.

PREEDY. I should have been glad of a minute or two to pull myself together.

SIDGRAVE. Oh no! Oh no! (*looking about. Going up C. and above settee. Looks on table L.*)

PREEDY. Have you lost anything, Mr. Sidgrave? (*following him round.*)

SIDGRAVE. I am merely seeking something that might furnish us with a reasonable excuse for her return to this apartment. (*behind settee*) Ah!—I perceive her mother's fan on the settee.

PREEDY. (*at upper end of settee*) Yes. Allow me. (*picking it up*)

SIDGRAVE. No, no! leave it there. (*crossing behind PREEDY to C.*) I'll send dear Emma to fetch it. I think that is a pretext in which tact and plausibility are rather happily combined. (*above PREEDY*)

(PREEDY *nervously replaces fan on settee. SIDGRAVE moves slightly towards door R.*)

PREEDY. Don't you think we might postpone it until to-morrow? If I were to call round about three thirty——

SIDGRAVE. Oh no! What does the old song say. "He either fears his fate too much—or his deserts are small—who dare not do something or other—" which has slipped my memory; but the general bearing of the quotation is obvious. I'll send Emma to you.

(*He goes into drawing-room, R.U.E.*)

(PREEDY *walks up and down nervously for a moment or two, mutters "I've done it!" He then goes to table and hastily pours himself out a glass of wine; murmurs "To Emma!" As he raises the glass to his lips, EMMA enters timidly from drawing-room. He sees her and chokes slightly. He is L. of table.*)

EMMA. Oh, pray forgive me, Mr. Preedy; I——
(*comes down between fire-place and table*)

PREEDY. (*gasping*) Don't name it, Miss Emma.

EMMA. I'm afraid I'm disturbing you.

PREEDY. Not in the least! I was—I was only putting away the wine.

EMMA. Mamma has mislaid her fan.

PREEDY. Really! (c.)

EMMA. She didn't notice it till papa pointed it out just now.

PREEDY. No?

EMMA. If you don't mind, I think I'll look for it.

PREEDY. Certainly, Miss Emma. Permit me to assist you.

(She strolls round the room to L. by writing-table L. and above settee. He lifts the table-cloth, kneels and carefully searches under table.)

EMMA. I don't see it.

PREEDY. *(on his hands and knees)* Neither do I. *(from above settee she sees fan)*

EMMA. Oh, here it is! *(picking up fan and coming down behind settee to L.)*

PREEDY. *(rising)* Ah! that's very fortunate. *(she is going R., he intercepts her departure)* Going already?

EMMA. Yes, I was. *(they are now both in front of settee)*

PREEDY. Don't—just for a minute. Searching for the fan reminds me of that capital game we used to play with the thimble—on Christmas Eve, I remember. Won't you sit down?

EMMA. Mamma may want her fan.

PREEDY. I don't think so. The evening has turned quite chilly.

(She hesitatingly sits on settee.)

I remember *(seats himself nervously by EMMA, on her R.)* the Christmas before last, when the excitement was at its height, it was discovered that young Mr. Saunders had concealed the thimble in his waistcoat

pocket. Even in a game in which no money stake was involved, it was a discreditable thing to do. How is young Mr. Saunders?

EMMA. Reggie?

PREEDY. I seem to remember hearing that his name was Reginald. A dentist, I believe?

EMMA. A surgeon dentist. He's very well; he often drops in.

PREEDY. Does he? Yes, he's the kind of man that would. Miss Emma, I suppose you're wedded to Manchester?

EMMA. Well, you see, I was born in Manchester.

PREEDY. Ah! but that might happen to anybody. What I mean is—— (*nervously*) Suppose a London man was able to nerve himself to ask you——

(EMMA looks at PREEDY.)

Pardon me, I've got it wrong. (*wipes his forehead with his handkerchief*) Could you bring yourself to marry a Londoner?

EMMA. That would depend on *what* Londoner.

PREEDY. Quite so. Well, some few months ago Mr. Bounsall wanted a partner.

EMMA. But I've never met Mr. Bounsall. I shouldn't care to marry anybody I don't know.

PREEDY. I'm afraid I'm not making myself entirely clear. Some months ago Mr. Bounsall, requiring a partner, permitted me to step down from a high stool into that responsible position. Now I also need a partner. Could you consent to become

my wife?—and allow me to include you, indirectly, as a member of the firm?

(BILSON comes in unnoticed.)

EMMA. I don't want to answer too quickly, because by and by you might say to me——

(BILSON has come to back of settee.)

BILSON. Would there be any objection to my clearing away?

PREEDY. (*rises, angrily*) What! Confound it! Yes, there would—every objection. Don't you see I'm busy? (*almost pushing BILSON towards pantry*)

BILSON. I've got to get to Hounslow, and it's nearly eleven.

PREEDY. I don't care if it's to-morrow morning!

(BILSON again withdraws. PREEDY sits.)

EMMA—may I say Emma?—is it to be a chilling “no” or a rapturous “yes”? I mean, of course, the rapture would be mine. Or must I endeavour to content myself with a tentative “perhaps”?

EMMA. If you're quite sure you'd like me to, I think I could——

PREEDY. (*clasping her*) Emma, dearest!—Queen of my heart!

EMMA. Wait. There is something I ought to tell you—about—Reggie Saunders.

PREEDY. Something about Reginald Saunders? For the love of Heaven, don't call him Reggie. What about Mr. Saunders?

EMMA. You'll—you'll be patient with me?

PREEDY. My feelings are entirely under my control. Ha, ha!—You see, I can laugh. Go on.

EMMA. He has always—er——

PREEDY. Go on! What has he always?

EMMA. Rather—I'm afraid very much—admired me; and some months ago he asked me to be engaged to him.

PREEDY. And what was your answer?

EMMA. I said I wasn't sure——

(PREEDY groans and turns away.)

Oh, please don't take it like that! (*puts her right hand on his left shoulder*) I wasn't sure then——

PREEDY. (*looks round at her; puts his hand on hers*) Not then? But you are now?

EMMA. Oh yes, indeed I am!—quite—quite sure.

(*He smiles beamingly.*)

PREEDY. My dearest!—Then the whole affair sinks into nothingness.

EMMA. Ah! but he's very persistent; he told me he should continue to hope; and he would write to me, though I told him not; and he went on writing and hoping; and I answered his letters now and then in a sisterly way. And papa and mamma didn't know, and it was very inconvenient.

PREEDY. If he dares to make himself disagreeable, I'll explain the whole affair to Mr. Sidgrave.

EMMA. Oh, Hamilton, you make me feel so much happier!

PREEDY. That, dearest, is my sole object in life.

Reginald Saunders may still drop in, but for all practical purposes he drops out.

(MRS. SIDGRAVE comes on R. U. E., followed by SIDGRAVE.)

Emma! (*about to clasp her again*)

MRS. SIDGRAVE. Young people! Young people! Have you any idea how late it is? (*coming R.C. by chair L. of table*)

(SIDGRAVE stands with his back to the fire-place. PREEDY and EMMA have risen.)

PREEDY. No, Mrs. Sidgrave. We—we have been occupied—absorbed—but we—we found the fan.

(PREEDY takes fan from EMMA and hands it to MRS. SIDGRAVE.)

MRS. SIDGRAVE. (*archly*) Thank you, Mr. Preedy. I ought to apologize for giving you so much trouble.

PREEDY. Oh no, not at all! We took a rest every now and then. The fact is, Mrs. Sidgrave, subject to your approval, Emma has just consented to—make—no—to render me the—as it were—happiest of men. (*takes EMMA'S right hand in his left and backs up stage slightly*)

MRS. SIDGRAVE. Emma, dearest, is this true?

EMMA. (*crossing to her mother*) Yes, mamma dear—if you and papa don't mind.

(PREEDY goes to back of settee down stage.)

MRS. SIDGRAVE. Mind, dearest? Your happiness

is ours. (*kissing her*) But I must say Hamilton has quite taken us by surprise. Has he not, papa?

SIDGRAVE. Completely!

 (*EMMA joins PREEDY at back of settee, on his R.*)

MRS. SIDGRAVE. I might have been careful not to mislay my fan, had I known the search for it would lead to your stealing a march——

PREEDY. Not a march, Mrs. Sidgrave; that's too solemn. Emma has changed the melody to six-eight time.

(*MRS. SIDGRAVE laughs gently.*)

MRS. SIDGRAVE. Very happily put! Well; now I just want one word with you. (*she crosses towards PREEDY*) Papa dear, talk to Emma for a minute.

(*SIDGRAVE and EMMA go up to window and talk apart*)

MRS. SIDGRAVE *sits on settee.* PREEDY *comes below settee and sits beside her.*)

Hamilton, at a moment such as this a mother's responsibility is a heavy one.

PREEDY. Oh yes, of course—heavy—as lead.

MRS. SIDGRAVE. London is the home of follies and temptations; there is a lamentable saying that where dissipation is concerned, young men will be young men. May I hope that you have been an exception to that painful rule?

PREEDY. I assure you, Mrs. Sidgrave, I've never gone in for reckless dissipation—with the exception of an occasional sacred concert. I've never been what you might call a man-about-town.

MRS. SIDGRAVE (*patting him on the shoulder*) I expected no less of you. You will pardon a mother's solicitude? (*rising and moving towards the others*) Now, papa dear, I'm afraid we must tear ourselves away. (C.)

PREEDY. It's really not very late, Mrs. Sidgrave.

MRS. SIDGRAVE. Ah! you must remember we are staying at a Family Hotel, where late hours are discouraged. Has the carriage come, papa?

(EMMA comes down stage slightly.)

SIDGRAVE. (*looking out of window*) I should say it probably has. Our job-master is usually punctual. How about your cloak, my dear?

PREEDY. Allow me, Mrs. Sidgrave (*going above settee to bedroom door L.*)

MRS. SIDGRAVE. No, no, don't trouble! (*crossing to door L. I. E. with EMMA*) We know where they are.

(*She and EMMA go into bedroom.*)

SIDGRAVE. (*up R.C., shaking hands with PREEDY, who returns to him—above the settee*) Well, my dear fellow, you see I was right. There was no cause for anxiety (*moving*) Let me see, I think I left my coat in the hall.

PREEDY (*getting hat and coat from hall*) I am triumphantly overjoyed. Let me give you a hand. (*helps him on with his coat*)

SIDGRAVE. Thank you. We shall doubtless find an opportunity for another pleasant little talk over things; for even a happy event like this has its

prosaic business side. Now where did I put my hat?

(PREEDY gives it to him.)

I am obliged. (goes above table to fire-place. Puts hat on table)

(MRS. SIDGRAVE and EMMA enter, L. I. E. MRS. SIDGRAVE sits on settee, EMMA at back of settee down stage.)

PREEDY. What are you doing to-morrow?

SIDGRAVE. Ah—mamma, what is to-morrow's programme? (putting on his gloves)

MRS. SIDGRAVE. (sitting on settee) Oh! as our time is so limited, we are crowding as much gaiety as we can into each day. I think to-morrow morning we had decided to visit the Royal Academy. Had we not, Emma? (putting on her gloves)

EMMA. Yes, mamma dear.

MRS. SIDGRAVE. Emma has never seen the inside of Westminster Abbey; and we have to make a few feminine purchases which I need not describe in detail. After luncheon we had thought of visiting the Imperial Institute and also the Natural History Museum, which is fortunately adjacent. (laughing) I fear you will think us very frivolous.

PREEDY. (c.) Oh no! Without its bright moments, life would be a tragedy.

MRS. SIDGRAVE. In the evening Mr. Sidgrave has to attend a dinner at Willis's Rooms.

SIDGRAVE. Masonic.

MRS. SIDGRAVE. Later, thanks to the fortunate fact that my nephew George is a Westminster scholar, we are to witness a performance of a Greek play.

PREEDY. You're having quite a time, aren't you?

SIDGRAVE. Ah! well, a little rational amusement keeps us young. How are you situated yourself to-morrow?

PREEDY. Unfortunately, as Mr. Bounsall is away, I'm rather tied by the leg—both legs, in fact; but I might have a dash at the Natural History Museum for half an hour or so.

SIDGRAVE. Do, my dear fellow. All work and no play is an excellent proverb. I tell you what, (*picking up his hat from table*) I'll call round in the early morning and we can then sketch out the campaign for the week. Good night! (*comes below table, meets PREEDY*) We are taking light hearts away with us. (*shaking him by the hand*)

MRS. SIDGRAVE. Papa, you and I will go on. (*going up R.C.*)

(PREEDY *crosses up stage to hall door, opens it.* MR.

SIDGRAVE *goes up between table and fire-place to hall door.* EMMA *goes up C. towards hall door.*)

I dare say Hamilton won't mind bringing Emma.

SIDGRAVE. Quite so. Good night, Hamilton.

(*They go off. Exeunt to L. through hall.* MRS. SIDGRAVE *exits, followed by MR. SIDGRAVE.* PREEDY *intercepts EMMA at door.*)

PREEDY. Emma, let me snatch this opportunity

of assuring you of a devotion that can only terminate with life.

(BILSON comes from pantry, unseen by PREEDY. Puts tray down by stand, No. 19.)

Now that we are alone again——

EMMA. But we're not.

PREEDY. What? (*turning round*) What are you doing there, Bilson? Whatever it is, I believe you do it on purpose.

BILSON. I could hear your friends were going at last, so I thought you'd wish me to see 'em out. (*behind settee*)

PREEDY. It is my intention to see them out myself. (*aside to EMMA*) Come, dearest; happily the stone staircase is still left to us.

(*She gives a rose to PREEDY.*)

(*They go out through hall.*)

(BILSON, who has picked up tray, goes over to table and rather deliberately begins to fold table napkins; throws them under side board, removes plates, etc., but leaves water-jug, a small tumbler, also serviette ring on L. of table, and an ash-tray. All decanters are put on the sideboard up R. The white table-cloth is not removed. BILSON takes up sherry decanter, pauses for a moment in doubt, listens, then slightly shakes his head and removes it and claret decanter to sideboard as PREEDY comes in. PREEDY ignores BILSON and sinks upon settee and remains wrapt in romantic reverie, gazing at the rose which EMMA has

been wearing. BILSON coughs, PREEDY takes no notice.)

BILSON. The clock has stopped. Could you oblige me with the time?

PREEDY. No, I couldn't; I'm not thinking of the time.

BILSON. I noticed that. And I suppose you haven't been turning your attention to the last Hounslow tram?

PREEDY. You're quite right, I haven't.

BILSON. Well, I 'ave; and if I ain't mistaken it's turning to wet.

PREEDY. (*again absently*) Is it? I dare say. I feel too happy to worry about the weather.

BILSON. Do you? Mr. Preedy, sir, when I was engaged to valet you, nothing was said about dinner parties—six courses for four persons—and no assistance given—is—well, it's thick!

(*Warning bell.*)

PREEDY. (*again rousing himself*) Eh? What's thick?

BILSON. I'm speaking of the dinner.

PREEDY. (*with some irritation*) The expression thick cannot be applied to the soup.

BILSON. That's a matter between you and cook. She's a nasty-tempered woman, as you know; she went straight 'ome after making the coffee.

PREEDY. Ah! now that *was* thick.

BILSON. (*ignoring the interruption*) She went

away without washing so much as a sauce tureen.
(*putting cigarette-box and matches on mantelpiece*)
But she lives at Brixton, and I don't know as I blame
'er.

PREEDY. Kindly concentrate your attention on
clearing away.

(*Bell rings.*)

I should much prefer—— Is that the bell?

BILSON. I didn't hear it—and I should be loath
to think that anybody calling himself a gentleman
would come as late as this. (*picking up tray*)

PREEDY. Well, I was about to say that I shall
be glad if you'll push on, because I should prefer
my room to your company.

(*Bell rings again.*)

There is some one. Go and see who it is.

BILSON *places tray on chair R. of hall door, and with
a look of concentrated indignation goes out.*)

PREEDY *gets up and goes hastily over to table, pours
water into glass, places rose therein, then goes to
window and looks out. BILSON returns, followed by
BOUNSALL, who is dressed in motor-coat and cap.*)

BILSON. Mr. Bounsall! (*to R. of door*)

PREEDY. Good evening, Mr. Bounsall! I didn't
know you were returning to town yet. (*up R.C.*)

BOUNSALL. My return was unforeseen but impera-
tive. Get rid of your man, will you? (*removing
motor-coat, gloves and hat; up L.C.*)

PREEDY. Certainly! Bilson, you needn't wait.

BILSON. How about clearing away? (*picking up tray*)

PREEDY. Oh! go to—Hounslow!

(BOUNSALL *has taken off his gloves.*)

Leave everything as it is—and clear yourself away.

(BILSON *shrugs his shoulders and departs in injured dignity into pantry.*)

Now, Mr. Bounsall, I'm quite at your service.

BOUNSALL. (*having removed motor-coat and hat, places them on chair up L.C., No. 6*) I find myself in rather a serious difficulty.

PREEDY. Will you have a cigar? (*up R.C.*)

BOUNSALL. No, I won't!

PREEDY. A cigarette?

BOUNSALL. When I want anything, I'll ask for it. (*crossing below table to fire place*) Kindly give me your attention.

(PREEDY *is about to speak.*)

Your silent attention. The state of my nerves is such that the man who interrupted me to-night would do it at the peril of his life. Sit down.

(PREEDY *sits on the extreme edge of a chair.*)

Preedy, the fact that you are where you are to-day is, I think, you will admit, entirely due to me.

PREEDY. I—— (*fidgeting with napkin ring, which he twists with the first finger of right hand.*)

BOUNSALL. Silence! You can thank me some

other time. You will greatly oblige me if you will leave off twiddling that ring. Well now, (*sits E. of table R.C.*) in the accounts that appear in the daily papers of the various distinguished social functions, you may have remarked the name of Joanna, Countess of Rushmere?

PREEDY. I may have. (*picking rose from glass and smelling it*) But I shouldn't like to swear to it.

BOUNSALL. You're not in the witness box, and it's entirely unimportant whether you have or not. (*takes rose from PREEDY and places it on table*) But she enjoys a celebrity which modern photography has done much to enhance. My friendship with Lady Rushmere originally came about through her husband—the Honourable Robert Jennerway.

PREEDY. I thought you said the Countess of Rushmere?

BOUNSALL. So I did; and, as I tell you, she is also my very intimate friend.

PREEDY. Oh yes, of course, I gathered that when you called her by her Christian name.

BOUNSALL. I did nothing of the kind!

PREEDY. Wouldn't she be Mrs. Robert Jennerway?

BOUNSALL. If you knew your Debrett, as every gentleman does, such an error would be impossible. Lady Rushmere is the widow of the late Earl of Rushmere, his nephew is the present Earl. His distinguished aunt-in-law has herself married again—this time the Honourable Robert Jennerway; but she

retains her title of Joanna Countess of Rushmere. Is that clear to you ?

PREEDY. Yes—oh yes, I think so.

BOUNSALL. Well now, Jennerway is a bad egg.

PREEDY. A bad egg ?

BOUNSALL. Yes. And, if I were inclined to indulge in a feeble jest, I should say that in a matrimonial sense the yolk has never been properly set.

PREEDY. (*feebly*) Ha, ha ! (*seated L. of table*).

BOUNSALL. What ?

PREEDY. I was merely conveying amusement.

BOUNSALL. Oh ! Well, Jennerway's marital fidelity has been intermittent. Matters culminated about the middle of last week, when, to pursue my comparison of the egg, he fell off the wall of propriety into the arms of a Viennese opera singer, and they have gone, so I understand, to Cairo. (*seated R. of table*)

PREEDY. Is the Honourable Humpty——

BOUNSALL. You understand his name is not actually Humpty—his name is Robert.

PREEDY. Quite so.

BOUNSALL. Well, this desertion of Jennerway's naturally placed Lady Rushmere in a distressing position ; she stood sorely in need of a friend, and, in a perfectly moral sense, a protector ; and at the moment when Jennerway executed his disreputable flank movement, Lady Rushmere was cruising on board my yacht ; we were, as we sailors put it, hugging——

PREEDY. Really? (PREEDY *has been gradually moving his hand towards the rose, which he now picks up*)

BOUNSALL. Hugging the coast.

PREEDY. Oh! Well, I suppose there's nothing in that.

BOUNSALL. Nothing whatever. It's a technical term. We were accompanied by friends, as I need hardly say. (*snatches rose from PREEDY and throws it on floor in front of table*) But she gave her confidence exclusively to me, and permitted me to persuade her to accept during the necessary legal delay the chaperonage of an aunt of mine, who, though an octogenarian, is still possessed of many—indeed, most—of her faculties, and who has a villa with three acres of arable land in Hertfordshire. (*looking for PREEDY, who has gone on his knees to pick up the rose*) Sit down!

(PREEDY *sits.*)

In Hertfordshire.

PREEDY. Exactly! I see—yes; it would make a pleasant change.

BOUNSALL. I was naturally anxious that our movements should escape observation; in view of which we motored up from Cowes to-day in my landaulet. Lady Rushmere is in need of rest and refreshment, and as her personality is widely known, hotels and restaurants are impossible. That, my dear Preedy, is the reason why I am here. (*rising*)

PREEDY. I'm not quite certain that I understand.
(*rising*)

BOUNSALL. We shall continue our journey to Hertfordshire in the early morning ; but, in bridging over the necessary interval, I depend on you.

PREEDY. On me ?

BOUNSALL. Yes. (*crosses below table to hall door. Picks up cap from chair*) I will fetch Lady Rushmere, whose patience must be nearly exhausted.

PREEDY. But you know, Mr. Bounsall, (*following BOUNSALL up stage*) I live in a modest bachelor way.

(*BOUNSALL places his cap on his head.*)

BOUNSALL. My dear good Preedy, that is understood. (*seeing rose in PREEDY'S coat, he quite casually snatches it out and throws it on floor by settee*) It's only for an hour or two.

PREEDY. You mentioned refreshment. As it happens, I have been entertaining friends.

BOUNSALL. Very fortunate !

PREEDY. But, from what I remember of the food when it was hot, I tremble to think what it will taste like now it's cold.

BOUNSALL. I'm sure Lady Rushmere will view everything with an indulgent eye. (*going*)

PREEDY. (*follows him*) Just a minute ! How do I address her ? You mentioned that she was Joanna, Countess of Rushmere. Do I say Lady Rushmere, or do I say Countess ?

BOUNSALL. Lady Rushmere is more usual.

PREEDY. I don't say Joanna ?

BOUNSALL. You certainly do not ! This may be rather an ordeal for you. Endeavour to brace yourself to meet it.

(He goes out, door L.C., into hall, and exits.)

(PREEDY remains transfixed for a second or two. His responsibilities then appear to dawn upon him. He hastily picks up the rose, puts it into glass on table R., after pouring water into glass from jug ; then hastily begins to rearrange the dinner-table. He is just replacing the two wine decanters which he brings from sideboard, when BOUNSALL returns, followed by LADY RUSHMERE.)

BOUNSALL. *(to LADY RUSHMERE, on her R.)* These, Lady Rushmere, are my partner's unpretentious rooms.

LADY RUSHMERE. Ah, yes !—very useful. *(strolls down L.C.)*

BOUNSALL. Preedy, I have the pleasure of making you known to Lady Rushmere. *(removes his cap and places it on chair R. of door)*

(On hearing their voices PREEDY, who has come down between fire-place and table, instinctively places both decanters behind him. He bows profoundly. LADY RUSHMERE advances to him and holds out her hand.)

LADY RUSHMERE. Glad to meet you !

(PREEDY is embarrassed with the decanters, and is unable to take it ; but he hastily places the decanters on the table and respectfully shakes hands.)

PREEDY. I am honoured—deeply honoured—er—Lady Rushmere. I was just making—a—a few hasty preparations. (*indicating the wine.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Thanks—yes—so I see. I dare say they'll come in handy.

PREEDY. Your ladyship is probably feeling very tired ?

LADY RUSHMERE. I'm a bit fagged, but it's all in the night's work.

BOUNSALL. May I suggest this settee, Lady Rushmere ? (*taking her cloak and placing it on window-seat*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Thanks. (*goes over to settee*) You've got pleasant quarters here, Mr. Preedy ; but they're a bit nearer to Heaven than I'm accustomed to. (*she sits*)

BOUNSALL. Yes. Really, Preedy, your staircase is interminable ! (*returning to c.*)

PREEDY. (R.C.) I'm afraid it is. There is a lift, but it's only for the removal of dust.

BOUNSALL. 'Sh ! 'Sh ! (c.)

LADY RUSHMERE. This invasion's rather rough on you—what ? I'm afraid we're lumbering you up ?

BOUNSALL. By no means ! Preedy is deeply gratified at the opportunity.

PREEDY. Deeply ; quite beyond my power to convey.

BOUNSALL. Well, now, Preedy, bustle about, will you ? Lady Rushmere is in pressing need of nutriment. (*goes up c.*)

PREEDY. Yes, of course, naturally! I'll go and forage in the larder.

(*He goes out into pantry. BOUNSALL comes to LADY RUSHMERE.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Seems a decent little chap—your friend.

BOUNSALL. Friend is perhaps over-stating the case. We may safely rely on his maintaining a proper and respectful attitude. On the whole, I thought it desirable to take him into my confidence—*our* confidence.

LADY RUSHMERE. As to what?

BOUNSALL. (*standing on LADY RUSHMERE'S R. at top of settee*) Well, I indicated the nature of our present difficulties, and dimly shadowed forth the glories of a possible future.

LADY RUSHMERE. Did you include my trip to your aunt in Hertfordshire among the glories?

BOUNSALL. Incidentally I did.

LADY RUSHMERE. Ah! Well, I suppose one oughtn't to look a gift aunt in the mouth, but "glory" strikes me as being a trifle exaggerated.

BOUNSALL. My aunt is an amiable and pious woman, and, until it became slightly impaired by time, of sterling intellect.

LADY RUSHMERE. Ah! I seem to be in for a good thing. Your friend appears to find the banquet rather a difficult problem.

BOUNSALL. That may possibly be so.

LADY RUSHMERE. Then why not go and help him to wrestle with it? It may be necessary to turn something out of a saucepan.

BOUNSALL. (*going R.*) Hardly a task for a man in my position to undertake, but—— (*turning at R. of table*)

(PREEDY comes in.)

Oh, here he is!

(PREEDY makes signs to BOUNSALL. BOUNSALL mutters, "What? What?")

PREEDY. (C.) My worst fears have been realized! The lamb cutlets—no, I'll be perfectly frank with you—the mutton cutlets—have gone.

BOUNSALL. Gone! Gone where?

PREEDY. I can't speak with certainty; they may have gone to Hounslow; on the other hand, they may have gone to Brixton.

BOUNSALL. (*with back to fire-place and hands on chair R. of table*) Preedy, you're hardly justifying the dependence I placed on you.

LADY RUSHMERE. It isn't his fault if his cutlets live in the suburbs. Really, anything will do. I hate being such a nuisance! Possibly a biscuit or a sandwich——?

PREEDY. A sandwich? During the last few minutes my breakfast ham has been floating through my mind. Would a ham sandwich——?

LADY RUSHMERE. Like it of all things?

PREEDY. That's very reassuring. (*going*)

BOUNSALL. Cut plenty, Preedy. (*round above table to c.*) I may try one or two myself.

PREEDY. Certainly.

(*He goes off into pantry U.L.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. You know, there'll be a hulla-baloo among the Rushmere division when they find I've disappeared.

BOUNSALL. (*on LADY RUSHMERE'S R., above settee*) Surely it's hardly a matter in which the nephew of your late husband has any special right of intervention?

LADY RUSHMERE. Rushmere's quite a good boy; but he's got a temper like a grilled turkey-leg. You see, he's bringing a little divorce of his own directly; and if I set up in the same way of business just now, he might think it was infringement of copyright. Then there's old Kinslow.

BOUNSALL. Lord Kinslow?

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes, Bob's father. He's always got a great notion of keeping things quiet; and the effect on him of my bucking up and doing anything on my own would be like taking a neuralgic patient to a Wagner concert.

BOUNSALL. That seems very unreasonable.

LADY RUSHMERE. Reasonableness is an article that Lord Kinslow and sons don't sell. When I took over Bob there was a tacit understanding that I should keep my eyes shut, my ears shut, and my mouth shut. By so doing I obtained the Kinslow blessing and inclusion in all the family dinner parties.

BOUNSALL. Well, but it will not be easy for them to trace you to Hertfordshire, and you acted on my suggestion in communicating with your lawyer?

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes; I said in my note all my letters were to be addressed here—care of Hamilton Preedy—just as you told me.

BOUNSALL. I thought that arrangement would be judicious. (*going a little to R. below table*)

(PREEDY comes in with dish of sandwiches.)

PREEDY. (C.) Here they are. I'm ashamed to have been so long, but the ham was a little less abundant than I had hoped.

LADY RUSHMERE. I think it's extraordinary good of you to bother. (*rises*) Is there anywhere where I could rub the dust out of my eyes? The last ten miles we had the car open, and I feel like a sand-heap.

BOUNSALL. I've no doubt Preedy can arrange.

(BOUNSALL takes the sandwiches from PREEDY.)

PREEDY. Certainly! (*crossing at back of settee to bedroom-door*) If Lady Rushmere will honour my sleeping apartment and overlook its shortcomings. (*He opens door of bedroom*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Thanks. (*turns at door*) Keep an eye on Mr. Bounsall while I'm gone, and don't let him eat all the sandwiches.

(*She goes into bedroom, D.L. 1 E.*)

(PREEDY laughs boisterously. BOUNSALL checks him with " 'Sh! 'Sh! " He immediately subsides and comes to C.)

BOUNSALL. A charming woman, but of course her reference to the sandwiches was not intended seriously, and I think I'll take one. (*takes one and places plate on table—he is above table*) Oh, by the way, I wish you to understand that if or when any letters are directed here to Lady Rushmere, care of Hamilton Preedy—er—Esquire—you'll have the goodness to forward them on to the Hertfordshire address, which I will leave with you.

PREEDY. (*going to table L.*) Your speaking of letters reminds me that Smithson brought round a telegram addressed to you which arrived just before closing time.

BOUNSALL. Where is it? (*coming to chair L. of table*) You might have mentioned it before.

PREEDY. Yes, I know; but I've had rather a busy evening, and it slipped my memory. Here it is.

BOUNSALL. (*takes telegram*) That breakfast ham is rather salt. Is that our whisky? (*indicating whisky on sideboard*)

PREEDY. Yes.

BOUNSALL. Ah! I was afraid so.

(BOUNSALL opens telegram, reads it, stands transfixed. Passes his handkerchief across his forehead; reads telegram again and sinks into chair L. of table.)

BOUNSALL. (*faintly*) Good Heavens! this is appalling!

PREEDY. No bad news, I hope, Mr. Bounsall?

BOUNSALL. This telegram means the dislocation

of all my immediate hopes. Man, you don't understand. This is from my godfather—that is to say, it isn't; it's from his medical man. His name is Pottinger.

PREEDY. The medical man? (L.C.)

BOUNSALL. No, no! The doctor's name is Thurlow. (*rising*) What the devil does it matter what the doctor's name is? He's over ninety. (*Coming down R.C.*)

PREEDY. Thurlow? (*down L.C.*)

BOUNSALL. Pottinger! You must be doing this to annoy me.

(PREEDY makes deprecating gesture.)

Do try to be serious! Doctor Thurlow telegraphs that the condition of old Mr. Pottinger's health is such that he cannot be expected to last many hours.

PREEDY. Dear, dear!

BOUNSALL. What?

PREEDY. I was merely expressing sympathy.

BOUNSALL. 'Sh! 'Sh! Oh! Well, Mr. Pottinger is possessed of exceptional wealth: two lace factories—Sh!—

(PREEDY puts his hand forward, BOUNSALL smacks it.)

Don't interrupt!—And a large estate near Nottingham. Until a year ago it was understood I was to be his heir. He is without blood relations. But a coolness arose between us in reference to the daughter of his first wife—the step-daughter——

PREEDY. Her step-daughter?

BOUNSALL. His step-daughter; his first wife's second daughter by a former husband. For the love of Heaven, Preedy, don't try to be funny at a moment like this! He was most anxious that we should marry.

PREEDY. You and the second daughter by the former husband?

BOUNSALL. Yes. For diplomatic reasons I encouraged the idea, but my intentions were never serious. It resulted in a breach between us which I regarded as irrevocable. However, at the eleventh hour——

(PREEDY looks hastily at his watch.)

PREEDY. It's later than that, Mr. Bounsall.

BOUNSALL. Your habit of ill-timed buffoonery will be your ruin. In his last moments——

PREEDY. Pottinger's last moments?

BOUNSALL. In Mr. Pottinger's last moments gentler counsels seem to have prevailed—(*picks up telegram from table*) and by the tone of this telegram from—er——

PREEDY. Thurlow?

BOUNSALL. From Doctor 'Thurlow—there is no need for undue familiarity—the wire says, “Mr. Pottinger sinking—anxious to be reconciled—come at once.” Now, what am I to do? I may tell you in confidence that the purchase of my yacht, coupled with a most unremunerative racing season, has somewhat crippled my resources; and here is a relative—(*going a little towards R.*) almost a relative—on the

brink of dissolution, who is willing to ignore past differences and endow me with his very considerable fortune. Palpably and obviously my place is by his side. (*at R. of table R.C.*)

PREEDY. Yes, no doubt that is so. But for the moment my mind was dwelling on—on—Joanna, Countess of Rushmere. Isn't your place by her side ? (*at L. of table R.C.*)

BOUNSALL. In a matter seriously affecting my—our—future interests, *I cannot* think she would wish me to swerve from the path of duty, and I——

(*LADY RUSHMERE comes on from bedroom.*)

Ah!—well, now, Lady Rushmere, I hope the effects of the journey are wearing off ?

(*PREEDY goes up C.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. (*crosses to chair L. of table R.C.*) I feel a bit more human since I've had a brush up. Well, Mr. Preedy, has he left any sandwiches ? (*she strolls over to table and sits*)

PREEDY. (*going hastily above her to top of table*) Allow me, Joanna!—Lady Rushmere——

LADY RUSHMERE. Oh, I see he's played light (*taking one*). Thanks ! If you want to do a really pious thing, you might give me a little soda-water.

(*PREEDY goes hastily to syphon which is on sideboard R., brings soda-water to LADY RUSHMERE.*)

PREEDY. Quite plain ?

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes, soda unadorned ; there is gout on both sides of the family.

(PREEDY *offers* LADY RUSHMERE *the soda-water.*)

Thanks ! Cheer up, Mr. Bounsall ; I shan't be long. Three bars rest—and then what ho ! for merry Hertfordshire.

(PREEDY *laughs boisterously* ; BOUNSALL *gives him a look* ; he goes L.C.)

BOUNSALL. Eh ?—Well—Hertfordshire—yes——

LADY RUSHMERE. It isn't that I'm personally yearning for Hertfordshire ; but that's the next item in the programme, isn't it ?

BOUNSALL. Yes, it was—and in a sense will be ; but the fact is, Lady Rushmere (*coming above table on LADY RUSHMERE'S R.*) Preedy has handed me a telegram—somewhat tardily—containing rather disquieting news, and some *temporary* postponement of our original plans may, I fear, be necessary.

(PREEDY *commences fidgeting with things on table L.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. What's gone wrong ? Has your aunt lost the remainder of her sterling intellect ?

BOUNSALL. No, not that. Information has suddenly reached me of the approaching demise of a revered godfather. I deeply regret the occurrence on its own account, but especially just now.

LADY RUSHMERE. Well, it does seem rather ill-timed. (*putting glass on table*)

BOUNSALL. My godfather is a man of very advanced age. (*slightly annoyed at PREEDY'S fidgeting*)

LADY RUSHMERE. I suppose he would be.

BOUNSALL. In fact, in a few years he would have

been a centenarian. Preedy, if you could check your tendency to restlessness,

(PREEDY at "centenarian" pulls drawer from table L., he drops it and contents are scattered with a clatter. After he is admonished by BOUNSALL, he replaces drawer and stands at back of settee.)

I should regard it as a personal obligation. He is an exceedingly wealthy man.

LADY RUSHMERE. The godfather?

BOUNSALL. Yes, very wealthy indeed. He has summoned me to his bedside, and compliance almost assumes the proportions of a duty. Of course, the sender of the telegram, doctor—er——

PREEDY. Pottlow.

BOUNSALL. What?

PREEDY. (*who is behind the settee*) Thurlow.

BOUNSALL. Oh, yes, exactly. Doctor Thurlow—may have exaggerated the seriousness of the immediate symptoms. You see the position?

LADY RUSHMERE. Whereabouts is your godfather's bedside situated?

BOUNSALL. Near Nottingham.

LADY RUSHMERE. So far as I can remember, that isn't exactly round the corner.

BOUNSALL. No. In my motor I could go there in a few hours, soothe his last moments, and get back some time to-morrow.

LADY RUSHMERE. Oh! Well, if the poor old chap wants you, you must trot along.

(BOUNSALL gets coat and returns to c.)

The only thing is—I hate to be a nuisance—but to-night isn't to-morrow; if there was any pal of mine in town I could collar hold of, it wouldn't matter; but I'm afraid there isn't.

BOUNSALL. Nothing is further from my intention than to desert the trust, the privilege, of securing your comfort at the present juncture. (c.)

LADY RUSHMERE. All right. Where had I better go? Hotels won't do. The situation seems to point to one of the seats on the Embankment.

PREEDY. Good heavens, no, no!

BOUNSALL. Preedy! Preedy! As if I should permit Lady Rushmere to be seriously embarrassed!

(PREEDY sits on settee.)

My return from Nottingham will be immediate. It is merely a question of bridging over a few hours. You will have to remain here during the interval.
(putting on motor-coat)

LADY RUSHMERE. How do you mean remain here?

BOUNSALL. Preedy will not object under the circumstances to spending the remainder of the night at an hotel, and will be more than happy to place his flat at your ladyship's disposal.

PREEDY. (with a sickly smile) Charmed!

BOUNSALL. (taking up his hat) Then that is settled. (fetching cap from chair)

LADY RUSHMERE. Here, wait a minute! I don't see how that arrangement is going to work.

BOUNSALL. Believe me, it will work admirably.

LADY RUSHMERE. You're unloading me on Mr. Preedy for the night—but where does he come in ?

BOUNSALL. He doesn't come in ; he will go out—to an hotel ; he will come in again to-morrow morning, and place himself unreservedly at your disposal.

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes—well, as I said before, I hate to be a nuisance ; but there are things one wants done for one.

BOUNSALL. Preedy will attend to everything.

LADY RUSHMERE. I don't know how far the range of Mr. Preedy's qualifications may extend, but I don't suppose he could do my hair.

PREEDY. (*in a faint voice*) Good Heavens ! (L.C.)

LADY RUSHMERE. You know you wouldn't let me bring a maid.

BOUNSALL. Preedy shall engage one for you early to-morrow morning. You'll see to that, Preedy ?

PREEDY. Yes—oh yes, certainly ! (*makes pencil note on cuff*)

BOUNSALL. By the way, your trunk. Preedy, go down and give my chauffeur a hand up with it.

PREEDY. Eh ? Oh, quite so !

(*He goes hastily into hall.*)

BOUNSALL. I hope you understand the pain it causes me that even this momentary break in our plans has occurred. I feel that until you are safely housed under the protecting wing of my female

relative, the moral reputation of both of us is, as it were, hanging in the balance. But meanwhile this flat will provide a temporary asylum. (*crosses above table to R.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. If this kind of thing goes on much longer, I shall want more than a temporary asylum.

BOUNSALL. I shall use every effort to compress my absence into a few hours' duration. You needn't hesitate to make every possible use of Preedy. (*taking cigarettes from box and filling his case*) He is under great obligation to me, and I feel it is only kind to give him an opportunity of showing his gratitude.

LADY RUSHMERE. You're doing it on rather a big scale.

BOUNSALL. (*returning above table to C.*) Preedy's limitations are obvious, (*smelling a cigarette*) but inside his modest sphere I'm sure you will find him well-meaning and most anxious to oblige.

(PREEDY and CHAUFFEUR enter with trunk. PREEDY bumps into BOUNSALL. Having deposited trunk, CHAUFFEUR goes out.)

Ah! here is Preedy. Now, Preedy, in confiding Lady Rushmere to you, I am aware your responsibilities will be heavy.

PREEDY. I've brought up the box. (*round above settee and down L.*)

BOUNSALL. I was not referring to that. You will regard her slightest wish as a command.

PREEDY. Exactly—certainly. As to my business duties to-morrow? (*at foot of settee*)

BOUNSALL. Put everything on one side. (*going to PREEDY*) You can arrange matters with Smithson, but understand that until my return the seclusion of Lady Rushmere must be strictly maintained, and my name must never be referred to. That is my final word. (*returns to LADY RUSHMERE. To PREEDY*) See what kind of a night it is.

(*PREEDY goes to window.*)

And now, (*turning to LADY RUSHMERE*) a brief good-bye. (*lowering his voice and taking LADY RUSHMERE'S left hand between both of his*) I hope you understand that my present errand of mercy involves financial considerations which will be to our ultimate mutual advantage?

LADY RUSHMERE. We can discuss all that later on. (*withdrawing her hand*)

BOUNSALL. Good night then, and good-bye until to-morrow.

LADY RUSHMERE. Good-bye!

BOUNSALL. Well, Preedy——

(*PREEDY comes down.*)

PREEDY. It seems to be raining a little bit.

BOUNSALL. Really? That's unfortunate. I'm going now.

(*PREEDY makes movement.*)

No, you needn't accompany me. Attend to Lady

Rushmere—and kindly observe all the directions I have given you. Good night!

(BOUNSALL *in backing up stage to door L.C., stumbles over travelling trunk which has been left across door. He steps over it to door.*)

PREEDY. Good night, Mr. Bounsall.

(BOUNSALL *exits through hall.*)

(*There is a second or two's pause. PREEDY comes hesitatingly down and stands timidly facing LADY RUSHMERE. She turns and looks at him for a second or two.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Well, here we are.

PREEDY. Yes. I—of course, your ladyship, that is so; it's very unfortunate that this interruption should have occurred.

LADY RUSHMERE. I suppose you mean unfortunate for you?

PREEDY. Oh, not at all! I was thinking of your ladyship.

LADY RUSHMERE. Well, speaking of myself, I say—won't you sit down and make yourself at home?

PREEDY. (*nervously*) Thank you. (*crosses above table to chair R. of table. He sits*)

LADY RUSHMERE. The Americans have an expression that it isn't wise to bite off more than you're able to chew. Mr. Bounsall has bitten me off, and I fancy I shall prove rather a big mouthful. You see, when a man starts bolting, he should know how to do it properly.

PREEDY. Yes ; I've always understood the careful mastication of food is a first essential in the avoidance of indigestion.

LADY RUSHMERE. No. We're getting our illustrations a little muddled. When I said "bolting" I meant eloping.

PREEDY. Eh ? Oh yes !

LADY RUSHMERE. You see, I've had a bit of experience in bolting——

PREEDY. Oh, indeed ?

LADY RUSHMERE. Years ago Rushmere and I bolted.

PREEDY. Oh, really ?

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes. That was the late Lord Rushmere—the present man's uncle. Might I bother you for a cigarette ?

PREEDY. I beg pardon, your ladyship ?

LADY RUSHMERE. Perhaps you don't smoke ?

PREEDY. Eh ? Oh yes, certainly ! These are Turkish—American ! *(he offers cigarettes and matches)* I hope you won't find them too strong.

(PREEDY lights match and holds it to cigarette which

LADY RUSHMERE takes and lights.)

LADY RUSHMERE. Thanks ! Where was I ?

PREEDY. I think you were eloping with the late Lord Rushmere.

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes. Well, he didn't treat the thing as if it were an oratorio. We nipped over to Paris, fixed up the marriage ceremony before lunch, and then travelled through to Monte Carlo and had

quite a giddy time—though there was something wrong with his system.

PREEDY. His nervous system?

LADY RUSHMERE. No; his system at the tables.

PREEDY. (*bewildered*) Oh!

LADY RUSHMERE. That was how Rushmere did things. But then he was a practical man. Now you're intimate with Mr. Bounsall, so I needn't hold my cards up. The fact is, I'm a bit doubtful whether bolting is quite his line of business.

PREEDY. He seemed anxious to take every precaution on your ladyship's behalf.

LADY RUSHMERE. I suppose you mean the aunt in Hertfordshire? Yes; but I don't know that I've much use for anybody's aunt.

PREEDY. She is, I believe, an eminently respectable lady of advanced age.

LADY RUSHMERE. Any aunt of Mr. Bounsall's would be both.

PREEDY. Well, you see, Lady Rushmere, doubtless Mr. Bounsall being a moral man—

LADY RUSHMERE. Oh yes, of course, he's a moral man; he was born so and can't help it.—But he might have the decency to keep it to himself. Leaving his aunt out of sight for a minute, there's his godfather—another instance of remarkable longevity.—I certainly didn't expect to have a godfather sprung upon me in the middle of the night in this way. I'm generally pretty easy-tempered, but it isn't cricket; if it comes to that, it isn't ping-pong!

PREEDY. I believe there has been a little friction between Mr. Bounsall and Mr. Pottinger.

LADY RUSHMERE. Is Pottinger the godfather?

PREEDY. Yes, your ladyship.

LADY RUSHMERE. Oh? Well, there's nothing in that. All my relatives by both my marriages have a knack of rubbing me up with sandpaper. For anything in the friction line I should be willing to back old Kinslow against all comers.

PREEDY. Lord Kinslow?

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes, my present husband's father. He's a fearful old waster. But we won't talk about him, or I might dream of him, and I shouldn't like that at all. (*putting cigarette in ash-tray*) By the way, as I've done a bit of travelling to-day, I feel rather played out. When would it be convenient for me to go to bed?

PREEDY. Oh, at once, Lady Rushmere. (*rising and coming c. above table*) Immediately, of course.

LADY RUSHMERE. Thanks. Whereabouts is the bed? (*rises, takes a step to R. and then turns*)

PREEDY. I'm afraid there is only one sleeping apartment:

LADY RUSHMERE. The one I sampled just now?

PREEDY. Yes. Of course it's a bachelor's bedroom, and a bachelor's bed; both a little restricted as to size—especially the bed.

LADY RUSHMERE. Well, I must pack away as much of myself in it as I can.

PREEDY. The bed is small (*with a look at LADY*

RUSHMERE'S *height*). Fortunately, by a special intervention of Providence, to-day is Monday and there are clean sheets.

LADY RUSHMERE. You mustn't spoil me. You know it's a deadly shame to send you floating off to an hotel at this time of night.

PREEDY. Oh, please, Lady Rushmere, don't consider me. I'm only worried as to your discomfort.

LADY RUSHMERE. You're quite a nice, kind little man. (*goes away from him to below table ; turns and looks at trunk*) I'm wondering whether it will be possible to get that box of mine into the bedroom.

PREEDY. Oh, certainly, your ladyship ! I'll carry it in.

LADY RUSHMERE. Thanks.

(PREEDY goes over to box and proceeds to struggle with it. She strolls round between fire-place and table to R.C. and watches his efforts. He has great difficulty in raising it. He eventually lifts it on his shoulders and staggers to settee, on which he falls.)

LADY RUSHMERE. I was afraid you'd find it a bit heavy.

PREEDY. Oh no ! I can manage it nicely. (*he tries to get it on to his shoulders again*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Let me give you a hand up. (*she helps him up with box*)

PREEDY. (*during business*) Very kind of you. (*He staggers off into bedroom with box. Noise off of falling box.*)

PREEDY. (*returning instantly, much out of breath*)
That's all right!

LADY RUSHMERE. Thanks!

PREEDY. (*suddenly remembering*) Oh, excuse me one moment! My overcoat and hat and a few other little things of mine are in the bedroom. I'll fetch them, if you don't mind.

(LADY RUSHMERE *strolls to window and picks up her cloak. PREEDY hastily goes and returns with his opera hat on and bringing overcoat and small bag; also pyjamas in bundle under his arm, which he places on the settee.*)

Now, your ladyship, I won't keep you any longer from your rest. I beg your pardon! (*takes off his hat, puts it on settee*)

LADY RUSHMERE. You needn't be anxious. After five hours' motoring with Mr. Bounsall I could sleep on a tram-line. Good night. (*she nods to him pleasantly and crosses towards door L. I. E.*)

PREEDY. Good night! Oh—just one point! Mr. Bounsall mentioned that you'd want a maid. (*down L. C.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes, I'm afraid I shall. (*returning a step or two towards him*)

PREEDY. Quite so. On my way back here in the morning, I'll call at the Registry Office and order one to be sent at once.

(*She nods thoughtfully.*)

(*Curtain warning.*)

Is there anything else that I could do?

LADY RUSHMERE. Well, it's just occurred to me ; I came away in a bit of a hurry and my hat-box seems to have been left behind. Perhaps while you're on the war-path to-morrow, you wouldn't mind calling at Pascarel's ?

PREEDY. Pascarel's ? (*taking out pencil*)

LADY RUSHMERE. The milliner's—just off Bond Street.

PREEDY. (*writing on cuff*) Pascarel's—lady's maid—just off Bond Street.

LADY RUSHMERE. The lady's maid isn't just off Bond Street.

PREEDY. Oh no ! I'm only making a few notes. I quite understand.

LADY RUSHMERE. (*strolling towards door*) You might tell 'em to send me round a few to choose from. Of course they'd know me at Pascarel's, but as things are, I suppose it wouldn't do to mention my name.

PREEDY. Oh no ! not for the wealth of the universe.

LADY RUSHMERE. I think we might chance it on those terms ; but if you say they're for a relative—don't make it your aunt, or else they'd send the wrong kind of hat. Good night.

PREEDY. Good night, Lady Rushmere. Oh !——

(*She pauses at door.*)

May I venture to beg that you'll keep your door locked until you hear my voice in the morning ?

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes.

PREEDY. My man will probably bring you my shaving water at eight thirty. He may be a little persistent, but don't answer him.

LADY RUSHMERE. I won't. Good night! (PREEDY puts on his coat.)

(She goes into bedroom and shuts door.)

(He moves about thoughtfully for a minute or two.

Murmurs: "Oh, money!" Goes to desk and gets out money. He then proceeds to pack his bag which is on settee, and unfolds his pyjamas preparatory to re-folding them for that purpose.)

PREEDY. That's all right!

(LADY RUSHMERE comes out.)

LADY RUSHMERE. Mr. Preedy!

PREEDY. Good Heavens! *(he puts pyjamas behind him and sits on them)*

LADY RUSHMERE. Fancy I left my bag here. *(crossing to table R.C. above settee)* Hope I'm not disturbing you?

PREEDY. Not at all—not in the least! I was only packing my—er—my unimportant essentials for the night. Shall I assist you?

(He rises and puts pyjamas under the back of his evening dress coat. She has crossed to table.)

LADY RUSHMERE. *(taking bag off table)* No, it's all right. I've got it. *(crossing to bedroom in front of settee)* Good night.

PREEDY. Oh, Lady Rushmere—

LADY RUSHMERE. (*pausing*) Yes? (*at bedroom door*)

PREEDY. One moment! Er—breakfast?

(*Warn rain*).

LADY RUSHMERE. I'm not a great hand at breakfast.

PREEDY. Fish? Fried bacon? Eggs? Cold ham?—No—I'm afraid the sandwiches have withdrawn the cold ham from the menu.

LADY RUSHMERE. Oh! well—perhaps an egg.

PREEDY. (*writing on cuff*) Perhaps an egg—fried? poached?

LADY RUSHMERE. Boiled!

PREEDY. Boiled. (*writes*) Thanks. Good night. Great Heaven! I was forgetting! Tea or coffee?

LADY RUSHMERE. Coffee. Good night.

PREEDY. Coffee. Good night. (*writes*)

(*Rain gently. Stand by for lights.*)

(*She goes into room.*)

(*He stands reading his cuff*) Pascarel's—lady's maid, just off Bond Street—perhaps an egg—boiled coffee. (*he goes up and puts on his coat, turns up the edge of his trousers, picks up his hat*)

(*Rain.*)

(*Key is heard turning in the lock of bedroom door. He pauses a moment, but cannot think of anything else. He then puts his hat on and goes up.*)

(Rain is heard falling heavily.)

PREEDY. Pouring in torrents !

(He opens door leading into hall, returns and extinguishes electric light of the room, pressing switch on R. of hall door. He goes out into hall, which is still lighted. As he disappears, lights off in hall.)

(He goes out, leaving door leading into hall open.)

(Door is heard to slam off L. Curtain descends on stage in total darkness excepting for slight glimmer through window as from street lamp below.)

CURTAIN.

ACT. II

SCENE.—*Same. Next morning. The large blind is up. All things removed from table R.C. which has now a cover. On table ash-tray and fresh copy of the "Daily Telegraph."*

(As curtain rises BILSON is at bedroom door—there is a small can of hot water outside. BILSON pauses and knocks at door—he pauses and after a second or two knocks again.)

BILSON. It's nine thirty—*(pause)* it's nine thirty—No, I'm wrong—it's nine thirty-five.

(Outer bell rings.)

(gets his coat from chair up c., puts it on) Look here, don't say as it's my fault, *(going up above settee to hall door)* because I've called you twice. *(he moves a few steps up towards back)* Now I come to think of it I've called you three times.

(He goes out into hall and admits MR. SIDGRAVE.)

SIDGRAVE. *(speaking at back)* I suppose Mr. Preedy hasn't left for the City yet? *(coming down R.C. and placing hat on chair L. of table R.C.)*

BILSON. He hasn't left because he isn't up. (L.C.)

SIDGRAVE. Not up yet?

BILSON. No, there's his shaving water—I can't wake him—you can have a try if you like. (*goes on putting mantelshelf in order*)

SIDGRAVE. Dear me! (*crossing to bedroom door*) I suppose he isn't often as late as this?

BILSON. He's pretty early as a rule—has to be.

(*SIDGRAVE knocks—first gently—then louder.*)

SIDGRAVE. Hamilton—Hamilton! (*slight pause*) Very singular—I notice the door is locked. (*trying handle of door*) Do you think he can be unwell?

BILSON. Well, I shouldn't be surprised. (*down R.C.*)

SIDGRAVE. Why? (*going to BILSON*)

BILSON. Cook says he must have got up in the night and finished the breakfast ham.

SIDGRAVE. Really! At the same time a late supper, though an injudicious thing in itself, seldom produces insensibility. Do you think we ought to send for a doctor—or burst open the door—or—or anything of that kind.

BILSON. If you like.

SIDGRAVE. I've not had much experience of bursting open doors—but if you will put your shoulder to it—I shall be happy to lend a little amateur assistance.

(*BILSON crosses to door and puts his shoulder to it—*

SIDGRAVE leans against BILSON.)

Now, then—Well, do you feel anything?

BILSON. I can feel that I ain't comfortable.

SIDGRAVE. Oh, nonsense, my good man—(*getting a little away from BILSON*) this is not a moment for personal considerations of that sort—let us try again.

(*They renew their efforts.*)

Well ?

BILSON. I think my ribs is giving way.

SIDGRAVE. It's in a good cause.

(*PREEDY enters from hall. He is wearing his hat and overcoat with collar turned up.*)

PREEDY. (*seeing them*) Here, hi ! For the love of Heaven don't do that—come away from that door.

(*They recoil much startled. PREEDY comes down C.*)

SIDGRAVE. My dear Hamilton ! (*going to him*)

PREEDY. Good morning, Mr. Sidgrave. (*shaking hands with him*)

SIDGRAVE. Good morning, my dear fellow—your appearance rather startled me.

PREEDY. Did it ? Why ?

SIDGRAVE. Well, as I was, not unnaturally, under the impression that you were still wrapt in slumber—in your bedroom, your arrival from an entirely different quarter was for the moment bewildering.

PREEDY. Yes—I—I've been out. (*crossing SIDGRAVE to L.*)

(*During this BILSON has been leaning exhaustedly against the door.*)

Move away from that door, Bilson. What are you

doing there? There's no need for you to be there.

BILSON. I'm feeling faint.

PREEDY. Then go and faint in the pantry—you can't faint there.

(BILSON takes up shaving-jug, moves away up stage between settee and table L. PREEDY goes over to door L. and listens.)

SIDGRAVE. You forsook your bed early.

PREEDY. I was compelled to forsake it—to tell you the truth I didn't occupy it at all last night—I—I—couldn't.

SIDGRAVE. How was that?

PREEDY. You see—after the occurrence of last evening my mind wasn't in a condition to——

SIDGRAVE. Ah yes, I understand—very romantic.
(by table R.C.)

BILSON. How about breakfast? (above top end of settee)

PREEDY. I'll attend to that later—you needn't wait. (C.)

BILSON. (going) You haven't left any of the ham.

PREEDY. When I want you I'll ring.

(During the following dialogue PREEDY is constantly wandering towards bedroom door, SIDGRAVE always following him and PREEDY gently pushing him away.)

(BILSON goes out into pantry.)

SIDGRAVE. As the fortunate husband of a devoted wife I can be lenient to the eccentricities of love—

from what your man says I infer that finding yourself unable to sleep you had a little cold ham and went for an early stroll.

PREEDY. Yes, I felt I wanted to think about Emma quietly somewhere—so I walked to Hampstead—it rained most of the time. (*edging towards door*)

SIDGRAVE. Ah well, there's nothing half so sweet in life—I called round to speak to you about our programme for to-day.

PREEDY. Yes—— (*he comes nearer to SIDGRAVE, but his attention is still divided*)

SIDGRAVE. The merry little jaunts we had sketched out——

PREEDY. Yes—delightful. (*he moves nearer to bedroom door again*)

SIDGRAVE. I was about to say (*following him slightly*) that our visit to the Imperial Institute and the Natural History Museum must be postponed to some future occasion.

(*Ready for noise off L. I. E.*)

PREEDY. Must it? (*going L., SIDGRAVE following*)

SIDGRAVE. Yes—my wife's sister-in-law, Mrs. Bagot, has suddenly become indisposed . . .

(*PREEDY indicates deep sympathy.*)

—temperature a hundred and two—and so forth—they're quite distinguished people, live in a turning just off Clarges Street, so naturally Mrs. Sidgrave responded to the call that summoned her to the sick

room—I myself have a couple of business appointments this morning, so I thought I'd just look in and let you know.

PREEDY. Most kind—most kind. (PREEDY is close against door)

SIDGRAVE. Emma—

PREEDY. Ah yes—(comes to SIDGRAVE) dear Emma—how is Emma?

SIDGRAVE. Oh, wonderfully well.

PREEDY. Ah, that's a good thing.

SIDGRAVE. She has gone at my suggestion to make an exhaustive study of the Albert Memorial.

PREEDY. Splendid!

SIDGRAVE. By the way, it just occurred to me—I hope I'm not making you late for the City?

PREEDY. No—oh no!

SIDGRAVE. You're sure? Because I . . .

(*There is a sound of something falling in the bedroom.*)

What was that?

PREEDY. What was what?

(*Door bell ready.*)

SIDGRAVE. Surely I heard a noise in your bedroom. (*moving as if going to bedroom*)

PREEDY. I—I don't think so. (*restraining him*)

SIDGRAVE. My dear Hamilton, I'm convinced of it—it sounded as if some heavy article of furniture had been overturned; is there any one in there?

PREEDY. Oh no—no one—I assure you, no one

at all; any little noise you heard must have been the canary——

SIDGRAVE. The canary? (*down c.*)

PREEDY. (L.C.) Yes, slamming to the door of his cage; he may have caught sight of the cat over the way—he's a quick-tempered bird.

SIDGRAVE. Shall we ascertain——(*making movement*)

(*Outer bell rings.*)

(PREEDY stops SIDGRAVE; they go up stage to R. of hall door—SIDGRAVE R.C., PREEDY C.)

PREEDY. No, I don't think we will. I feel it's selfish of me to detain you (*taking him by the left arm and leading him up*) while you're so worried about poor Mrs. Maggot.

SIDGRAVE. Bagot!

PREEDY. Bagot.

SIDGRAVE. Ah well, good-bye; you might call round at the hotel in the course of the afternoon. (*picking up hat*)

(BILSON enters from hall.)

PREEDY. If I can possibly manage it, I will. Good-bye.

(*They are shaking hands.*)

BILSON. Harriet Budgen—— (*at left of door*)

(SIDGRAVE and PREEDY move apart.)

PREEDY. Harriet Budgen?

BILSON. From the Registry Office—to see you immediate. (*he stands on one side*)

(HARRIET passes him into the room; BILSON goes out into pantry.)

PREEDY. Eh? Oh yes—will you sit down—I'll attend to you in a moment.

HARRIET. I was told not to lose time. (*coming down to settee. Sits as PREEDY indicates settee*)

PREEDY. No—we won't lose time. (*he hurries over to SIDGRAVE who is up R.C. and says aside*) She's a young protégée of Mr. Bounsall's—it's a matter of charity—she's an orphan.

SIDGRAVE. Ah, indeed.

PREEDY. Oh yes—seven brothers and sisters—her father fell down a mine.

SIDGRAVE. Dear! dear!

PREEDY. Mr. Bounsall's very worried about it—her grandmother was his father's housekeeper.

SIDGRAVE. Very creditable to Mr. Bounsall. Well, I mustn't delay—but I should just like to say one word to the young person. (*crossing to L.C.*)

PREEDY. I don't think I would—she's easily upset.

SIDGRAVE. You can depend on my discretion. (*to her*) My good girl—I'm very sorry for you.

HARRIET. Are you?

SIDGRAVE. I am indeed; I should like to put a question to you—was your father a mason?

HARRIET. No; he was a corn chandler.

SIDGRAVE (*turning to PREEDY, who is by chair L. of table*) Then what was he doing down a mine?

PREEDY. It was one Bank Holiday.

(*They go together towards hall door.*)

SIDGRAVE. Ah yes—people's spirits get the better of them on those occasions. Good-bye till we meet again.

PREEDY. (*shaking hands with him*) Good-bye.

(*SIDGRAVE goes out.*)

(*PREEDY looks at HARRIET uneasily for a moment, removes his overcoat and places it on window-seat, places hat on table L., then pulls himself together, crosses R.C., assumes an air of dignity, and seats himself L. of table, R.C.*)

You've come from the Registry Office?

HARRIET. Yes, sir. (*rising*) I was told you required a lady's maid at once.

PREEDY. That is so; are you thoroughly experienced?

HARRIET. Yes, sir.

PREEDY. Good character?

HARRIET. I was three years in my last situation—and left of my own accord.

PREEDY. Ah—good character during the past three years—just so.

HARRIET. (*she produces letter and hands it to him*) That's my reference from the Honourable Mrs. Desborough.

PREEDY. (*taking it*) Ah—yes—(*putting on pincenez and glancing at it*) Yes—I see—I see. (*he hands her letter*)

(*She returns to settee.*)

I gather from this that you are fully capable of discharging all the duties of a lady's maid.

HARRIET. Yes, sir. (*sits*)

PREEDY. Wages?

HARRIET. Thirty—including beer—I don't take beer.

PREEDY. Thirty pounds—including beer—and you could come to us at once?

HARRIET. Yes, sir, if your wife requires me. (*pause*)

PREEDY. Wife—wife—ah yes!—the lady is not my wife, she's—oh no!—she's not my wife.

HARRIET. Sister?

PREEDY. No—not my sister—not exactly.

HARRIET. Aunt or mother?

PREEDY. Not altogether.

HARRIET. Grandmother?

PREEDY. No, certainly—not grandmother.

(*HARRIET gives him one searching glance.*)

She's not—we're not exactly related—she's married—about to be married—may be married to a friend of mine—he was unavoidably called away.

HARRIET. Yes, sir.

PREEDY. And prior to his return she has done me the honour to accept my hospitality.

HARRIET. Oh, indeed, sir. (*another look, with a raising of the eyebrows*)

PREEDY. She left hastily the place—she—she came away from—and didn't bring her maid with her.

HARRIET. No, sir?

PREEDY. No; at the present moment she's in that room—my bedroom—and until you go to her I doubt if she can manage to get up—you understand the position.

HARRIET. Yes, sir, I quite understand the position.

PREEDY. Then we can consider the matter settled?

HARRIET. I beg pardon, sir—wages? (*HARRIET rises*)

PREEDY. Oh, we arranged—thirty pounds—including beer.

HARRIET. Forty!

PREEDY. (*rises*) Forty!

HARRIET. Yes, sir; if the lady I'm to wait upon isn't your wife, nor your sister, nor your aunt, nor your mother, nor your grandmother, I should require forty.

PREEDY. You know, I feel certain that you *don't* understand.

HARRIET. Thank you, sir, I feel certain that I *do*—your friend as was here when I came said he was sorry for me.

PREEDY. He's a poor law inspector—that was force of habit.

HARRIET. That's as may be ; I've seen a good bit of the world—here and there—when a girl's been a lady's maid in the best families she's bound to ; other people's business is their business—and none of mine—but I couldn't take less than forty.

PREEDY. Ah well then, we'll say forty, including beer.

HARRIET. No, sir, not including beer.

PREEDY. It seems to me, Harriet Budgen, you're becoming extortionate ; you allowed the admission to escape you that you don't *take* beer.

HARRIET. I don't generally, but in some places one feels to want it—I think this is one of them.

PREEDY. (*rather desperately*) Well, I won't haggle. (*going a little to R. Looking at his watch*) I can't—I don't know if you realize that in that room there is an unhappy lady, who, thanks to you, is practically bedridden—you shall have forty pounds per annum—and beer—in moderation. (*returning to C.*)

HARRIET. Thank you, sir.

PREEDY. Now we'd better begin as we mean to go on.

HARRIET. Yes, sir. Could I go somewhere and take off my hat and coat ?

PREEDY. Certainly. (*going above table to fireplace*) (*ringing bell. Returning to R.C. above table*) Oh—er—by the way—the lady you are to wait upon is very distinguished—you'll have the goodness to address her as “my lady.”

HARRIET. Oh, indeed, sir.

PREEDY. Yes, I suppose you've no objection to that?

HARRIET. No, sir.

PREEDY. You don't require any further rise of salary for the moment?

(BILSON enters from pantry.)

HARRIET. Oh no, sir? (*moving a little to the L.*)

PREEDY. That's a comfort. Bilson, I've engaged this young person. (R.C.)

BILSON. What for? (C.)

PREEDY. Never mind what for—that's my affair—she will take her things off at once in the pantry.

BILSON. What!

PREEDY. She will take off her hat and coat in the pantry—why not? Show her the way to it.

BILSON. Oh! (*to HARRIET*) Through that door. (*points to pantry*)

(*HARRIET goes out between settee and table L.*)

(*to PREEDY*) How about your breakfast?

PREEDY. Don't worry me about breakfast—I have breakfasted.

BILSON. (*going*) Very good.

PREEDY. Here, wait a minute—I think my brain is giving—of course I shall want breakfast.

BILSON. But you said you had breakfasted.

PREEDY. I suppose I can breakfast as often as I please. (*pulling down cuff*) I shall require coffee and Pascarels.

BILSON. What?

PREEDY. And perhaps a boiled egg.

BILSON. Perhaps a boiled egg?

PREEDY. No—not perhaps—under any circumstances—an egg—boiled—inevitably boiled.

(BILSON goes out into pantry.)

(goes over to bedroom door) Lady Rushmere! (pause)
Lady Rushmere!

LADY RUSHMERE. (*speaking through*) Hullo!

PREEDY. It's to-morrow morning—and I've engaged a lady's maid. I beg pardon, I didn't quite catch what you said. Oh, yes, I think she's competent—she ought to be judging by the salary. Eh? Managed by yourself? Oh, don't tell me that.

(BILSON enters—comes down c.)

I'm quite ashamed you should have managed by yourself. (*stooping with ear close to keyhole*)

BILSON. Mr. Preedy. (c.)

PREEDY. (*to LADY RUSHMERE*) Yes, certainly—I've ordered breakfast. . . . Coffee and perhaps an egg boiled and——

BILSON. Mr. Preedy.

PREEDY. (*looking over his shoulder*) What is it?

BILSON. I should wish things to be placed on a proper footing.

PREEDY. What do you mean? (*going slightly towards him*)

BILSON. What I mean is this—you've added to your staff of domestics without a word to me—and I

should wish to make sure that this young person's dooties and my dooties are not going to clash.

PREEDY. You are supposing an impossible case ; the young person has been engaged to take over certain responsibilities in the household which you are not competent to discharge.

BILSON. Oh, I'm not competent.

PREEDY. Not competent to—to do what will now be required—not for to-day ?

BILSON. Then she's engaged for the day ?

PREEDY. No, she isn't—it'll depend on—whether she gives satisfaction. (*he again hovers round door*)

BILSON. I tell you what it is, Mr. Preedy, sir—things in this flat are beginning to look a bit peculiar ; when young girls are brought into the place without rhyme or reason, and the gentleman stands muttering to himself with 'is 'ead jammed up against 'is own bedroom door, it is about time for a keeper to be engaged—(*going R.*) engaged permanent.

(*HARRIET comes on.*)

HARRIET. I'm ready now, sir. (*coming C.*)

PREEDY. (*to her*) Oh, there you are. (*L.C.*) That's all right—one moment. (*he goes to bedroom door and knocks*) Lady—Lady—your ladyship.

LADY RUSHMERE. (*speaking through door*) Yes. (*When BILSON hears LADY RUSHMERE'S voice he turns and gazes at bedroom door with a look of blank astonishment.*)

PREEDY. Your maid is ready to enter on her duties.

(*Unlocks door L. I. E.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Very good—send her along.

PREEDY. (*to HARRIET*) Step this way, if you please.

(*HARRIET goes into bedroom.*)

(*During all this BILSON has surveyed them with great astonishment. He and PREEDY look at one another for a moment.*)

Well now, I suppose I shall *have* to explain matters to you—it really seems inevitable.

BILSON. If you please, sir.

PREEDY. You were a waiter for five years in a West End restaurant?

BILSON. What of it?

PREEDY. Why—you must have had opportunities of noticing that a man is sometimes the victim of circumstances.

BILSON. All this pints straight to 'Anwell.

PREEDY. That room—my bedroom—is at the present moment occupied by—a lady.

BILSON. Another of 'em? (*giving a searching look at PREEDY*)

PREEDY. What do you mean by that? The young person—whose name, by the way, is Harriet Budgen—has been engaged to wait upon the lady during such time as she honours my flat with her presence.

BILSON. Oh!

PREEDY. She is shortly to be married to an intimate friend of mine.

(Telephone bell rings.)

BILSON. Harriet Budgen!

PREEDY. Certainly not—the lady—who is in there. My friend, for reasons into which I do not intend to enter, has temporarily gone away, and left her to me.

(Slight pause.)

BILSON. Mr. Preedy, sir, I've always tried to keep myself respectable—I should wish to leave this day month.

PREEDY. You wish to leave?

BILSON. This day month.

PREEDY. Very good—there will still be sufficient margin of time for you to get breakfast—go and get it. *(going L. a little)*

(BILSON goes out into pantry.)

(Telephone sounds.)

The thing for me to do is to hold on to my reason as long as I can; ah! the telephone!

(Bell rings again.)

(speaking down telephone) Hullo! hullo! who is it? I seem to be listening to the entire traffic of the City. Who is it? Oh—Smithson! Well, when am I coming down to the Emporium? I couldn't say to an hour or two—what? Very inconvenient—why? Johnson and Lickfold want to renew con-

tract. I can't attend to them now. Tell 'em I've got the "flu" and that I shall be infectious till the day after to-morrow. Good-bye. (*replaces receiver*)

(BILSON comes on bringing in breakfast; PREEDY looks round.)

BILSON. Breakfast. (*speaking as he crosses to table R.C. Removes coffee-pot to R. of tray*)

PREEDY. Oh—ah yes—coffee? (*crossing to head of table, with BILSON on his R.*)

BILSON. Coffee. (*crossing above PREEDY to C.*)

PREEDY. And—er—the egg. (*picks up the egg in egg-cup*) Is it a reliable egg? An egg that will justify confidence?

BILSON. I didn't buy it, and I didn't lay it. (*going L.*)

PREEDY. That's understood.

(BILSON is going.)

One moment—if we find that the egg is not sufficiently recent, cook must be prepared to instantly boil another—relays of eggs if necessary.

BILSON. Anything else?

PREEDY. Not at present.

(BILSON goes off into pantry.)

(PREEDY goes over to bedroom door—knocks.)

PREEDY. Your ladyship.

LADY RUSHMERE. (*speaking through*) Yes.

PREEDY. There isn't any hurry—but breakfast is ready.

LADY RUSHMERE. Quite right—I'll come.

(PREEDY returns to top of table and does a little business, during which LADY RUSHMERE comes on in morning dress.)

LADY RUSHMERE. Morning.

PREEDY. Good morning, Lady Rushmere—I hope—I sincerely hope you passed a good night. (*going to R. of table above chair R.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Thanks—I've known worse. (*crossing to top of table*)

PREEDY. (*with a smile*) Ah!

LADY RUSHMERE. Perhaps not many!

PREEDY. (*depressed*) Oh!

(*She sits at top of table.*)

The bed?

LADY RUSHMERE. The bed——?

PREEDY. I feared it; you found it rather restricted?

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes, there wasn't much scope—it's all right, I got through. How did you get on?

PREEDY. Oh, thank you, Lady Rushmere—I saw to myself.

LADY RUSHMERE. One often does at an hotel.

PREEDY. (*pouring out coffee*) Coffee—hot milk?

LADY RUSHMERE. Thanks.

PREEDY. Sugar?

LADY RUSHMERE. Please.

PREEDY. (*he hands cup to her*) And—now—er—the egg (*hands egg to her*). Of course, we're not in the

country, and if you should find it the least bit too—too metropolitan—don't hesitate to say so.

LADY RUSHMERE. (*tasting it*) Oh no—it's very nice.

PREEDY. You're sure?

LADY RUSHMERE. I am really—it's quite a competent egg.

PREEDY. That takes a weight off my mind. (*sits R. of table*)

LADY RUSHMERE. I suppose *you've* breakfasted?

PREEDY. Thank you, yes—I was up very early—they weren't very obliging at the hotel, so I had a little something in a cabman's shelter. By the way, I hope you find Harriet Budgen satisfactory?

LADY RUSHMERE. Oh, I think so—she's fairly experienced—she seems to have rather misread the present position.

(PREEDY *gradually realizing her meaning looks deeply distressed.*)

PREEDY. (*hesitatingly*). Oh—yes.

LADY RUSHMERE. Don't take it to heart—I'm afraid it was inevitable; after all, our backs are broad—at any rate, mine is; we shall be able to get your moral character out of pawn in the course of an hour or two—you'll be your own man again, and I shall be in Hertfordshire. I wish I could change with you.

PREEDY. I hope, Lady Rushmere, Harriet Budgen has not been disrespectful.

LADY RUSHMERE. Oh, not a bit—I saw to that.

I suppose that light-hearted sportsman, Mr. Bounsall, hasn't sent a wire ?

PREEDY. Not yet ?

LADY RUSHMERE. Nor telephoned ?

PREEDY. No.

LADY RUSHMERE. Ah, still busy soothing his god-father ? Now if I wanted soothing, I can't imagine myself selecting Mr. Bounsall to do it. You see, as I told you last night, he's hardly the kind of man one wants to bolt with. I didn't sleep particularly well—so I spent an hour or two turning things over.

PREEDY. I was afraid the bed would require remaking.

LADY RUSHMERE. Turning things over in my mind, and on reflection it occurs to me that I've thrown my bonnet over the wrong windmill. My second husband, Bob Jennerway, is quite a likeable chap, but his appreciation of the sex is a little too diffused ; if he could have concentrated his attention on about twenty women at a time we should have got on better—of course, you've heard about this last little lark of his ?

PREEDY. Mr. Bounsall mentioned Egypt.

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes, he's trotted off to Cairo.

PREEDY. With—a—professional lady ?

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes—of sorts.

PREEDY. Very painful for your ladyship.

LADY RUSHMERE. So far as that goes—I don't know that it's going to turn out a particularly soft thing for Bob—it's the wrong season for Cairo, and

from what I'm told she's pretty certain to start dancing on his corns before very long—and with nobody to complain to but the courier, I don't think Bob will find it much of a Bank Holiday.

(PREEDY rises and strolls up by fire-place and above table to c.)

PREEDY. It was naturally this deplorable state of affairs that compelled your ladyship to——

LADY RUSHMERE. Try a fresh deal—yes—if I'd had a single trump in my hand you can take your oath I shouldn't be going to Hertfordshire; (*rising and going to chair L. of table*) speaking as a man who knows him, when should you think Mr. Bounsall is likely to honour us with a little bit of his attention? Because, you see, until he does it seems to me we're stuck. (*sits*)

PREEDY. Well—yes—of course we undoubtedly are. (*sits on settee*)

LADY RUSHMERE. So far as I'm concerned, I don't care the half of a split straw what anybody says or thinks, but if we're held up in quarantine together much longer—my new maid, what's her name again——?

PREEDY. Harriet Budgen.

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes—well, Budgen's view of the position is not unlikely to be generally accepted.

(*Door bell ready.*)

PREEDY. Oh, I hope not.

LADY RUSHMERE. Well—but you know, to the

casual observer why am I here? I'm not the kind of person you're likely to have adopted, and therefore the average looker-on would at once start thinking what is usually called—the worst.

PREEDY. Surely a humble individual like myself could never aspire to be misunderstood in the very gratifying way your ladyship implies?

LADY RUSHMERE. That's a very modest view to take of it; but, anyhow, there's no reason why you should get into the papers before your time; so if Mr. Bounsall doesn't hurry up I shall give him away—with a pound of his own tea—and you can start fair again.

PREEDY. Oh, Lady Rushmere, (*rising*) it would be ruin to me to disregard Mr. Bounsall's wishes.

LADY RUSHMERE. All right—of course, if you like we'll play the game out.

(*Outer bell rings.*)

PREEDY. That may be a telegram. (*going up c.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. We'll hope so. (*rising*) By the way, were you kind enough to call at Pascarel's?

PREEDY. Oh yes, I called.

LADY RUSHMERE. It's late in the season; had they got anything promising in the way of hats?

(*BILSON comes in from hall, goes to L. of PREEDY.*)

PREEDY. Eh? Oh yes, I think so. (*to BILSON*) What is it?

LADY RUSHMERE. Did you notice anything that looked human?

PREEDY. I don't know that I did.

(LADY RUSHMERE goes below table to fire-place)
What is it, Bilson?

BILSON. Young man to see you.

PREEDY. I haven't time to attend to any young man just now.

BILSON. Says he must see you—says his name is Saunders.

PREEDY. Reginald Saunders?

BILSON. His name may be Reginald—I couldn't say—I haven't known him long enough.

(LADY RUSHMERE strolls to top of table.)

PREEDY. (*reflectively*) Saunders—good heavens!

LADY RUSHMERE. Of course, what I wanted was a large black hat if they'd got anything possible.

BILSON. Am I to show in Saunders?

(PREEDY is now between LADY RUSHMERE and BILSON, and above chair L. of table.)

PREEDY. Yes—no—not for a minute. Your ladyship—a young gentleman—that is a young man wishes to see me on an unpleasant little matter of business; may I ask you to go into my modest drawing-room for a short time? (*going to drawing-room door and opening it, and returning to R.C. up stage*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Of course—why not?

(LADY RUSHMERE goes up and turns at door.)
You told them at Pascarel's?

PREEDY. I told them to send round a large assort-

ment of hats for your ladyship's selection. (to BILSON) Show in Mr. Saunders.

(BILSON goes off into hall.)

They'll probably be here directly.

LADY RUSHMERE. That's all right. Thanks very much.

(She goes into drawing-room and shuts door.)

(PREEDY goes above table to fire-place. At that moment BILSON comes in from hall followed by SAUNDERS, who comes down c.)

BILSON. Mr. Saunders.

(BILSON goes off into pantry.)

PREEDY. Good morning.

SAUNDERS. Good day.

PREEDY. I'm afraid I can't ask you to sit down, as I'm exceptionally busy.

SAUNDERS. I shan't detain you very long; I consider that I have a strong grievance, Mr. Preedy, and I don't intend to take it lying down—or sitting down.

PREEDY. Exactly. I fancy we have met before.

SAUNDERS. We have.

PREEDY. Unless my memory deceives me; we hunted the slipper together the Christmas before last.

SAUNDERS. We did—at the house of Mr. Sidgrave.

PREEDY. And it was followed, if I'm not mistaken, by "Consequences"?

SAUNDERS. It was—by consequences we were not then able to foresee. (pause) I happen to be in Lon-

don for a few days, and while on my way to call on Mr. Sidgrave, I met Miss Emma Sidgrave outside the hotel. She was just starting to visit——

PREEDY. The Albert Memorial. I'm quite aware of it. (*coming below table*)

SAUNDERS. Well—(*crossing to R.C. by chair L. of table*) I don't know that anything will be gained by beating about the bush. I love Miss Emma Sidgrave, and some months ago I made my feelings clear to that lady.

PREEDY. Surreptitiously?

SAUNDERS. That is an insulting remark.

PREEDY. It's your fault, Mr. Saunders, if I find it necessary to regard you in your professional capacity. (*going to SAUNDERS, who takes a few steps to the left so that PREEDY is below chair at L. of table*)

SAUNDERS. How do you mean?

PREEDY. It's thanks to you that I'm beginning to show my teeth—Miss Emma Sidgrave has promised to become my wife.

SAUNDERS. She mentioned the engagement, but—

(*Door bell ready.*)

—everything points to undue influence. What chance has a quiet unassuming provincial dentist against a wealthy alluring Londoner, who is leading, I dare say, a typical London life?

PREEDY. My life in London typical? I never heard a more disgraceful accusation; the daily round of my business leaves me scarcely a moment for leisure of any kind.

SAUNDERS. Then why aren't you attending to it?

(Outer bell rings.)

PREEDY. My business is my business, and not yours; my home life is one practically of unbroken solitude; weeks pass without my hearing a voice, except that of my cook-housekeeper and my male attendant, and yet you venture to imply that I am wallowing in the vortex of London dissipation.

(BILSON comes in from hall with milliner's boxes one on the top of the other.)

You imply this to me, a lonely man—leading a lonely life.

BILSON. Somebody from Pascarel's *(coming down between PREEDY and SAUNDERS)* has left these boxes of hats for the lady to choose from and will call back later.

PREEDY. Yes—put them down—put them down. I'll see to them by and by—you can go.

(BILSON crosses behind SAUNDERS to back of settee, on which he places the hat-boxes.)

(BILSON goes out into pantry—pause.)

SAUNDERS. Hats! *(not moving, but turning his head and looking at the boxes)*

PREEDY. What of them?

SAUNDERS. For the cook-housekeeper.

(PREEDY goes over in front of SAUNDERS and takes up the boxes. SAUNDERS goes to R.C.)

PREEDY. Mr. Saunders, the Bounsall Emporium

has not gained the title of universal for nothing. (*calls*) Budgen! Millinery is not the least important among our numerous departments, and these are samples submitted for my inspection. (*he picks up the boxes*) Budgen!

(*HARRIET appears in doorway.*)

Kindly take these, will you? (*gives HARRIET the boxes*)

(*She goes into the bedroom.*)

Now, sir, I don't see that anything will be gained by our prolonging this mutually unpleasant interview. (*down stage L.C.*)

SAUNDERS. Very well, Mr. Preedy, but in spite of anything you may say I shall continue to hope. (R.C.)

PREEDY. I've no objection to that, so long as you don't do it here; the whole of London is open to you to hope in—with the exception of my flat.

(*HARRIET comes out from bedroom, L. 1 E.*)

SAUNDERS. Moreover, it is my belief that— (*he sees HARRIET and pauses*)

(*PREEDY turns and sees HARRIET.*)

HARRIET. Could I speak to my lady for a moment, sir?

PREEDY. Eh? Yes, she's in the drawing-room.

(*HARRIET crosses up L. and above settee to drawing-room R.U.E. and goes off.*)

(*The two men turn on their heels and watch her off, and then come face to face again.*)

SAUNDERS. (*after a pause.*) Rather a young cook-housekeeper.

PREEDY. I suppose I can engage my own staff of domestics without previous consultation with you?

(LADY RUSHMERE *enters, followed by* HARRIET.)

You're adopting an attitude which you may have to justify later in a court of law.

(LADY RUSHMERE *comes down c. between them.*)

Your entirely unwarrantable—(*catches sight of* LADY RUSHMERE *with a drooping inflection*) unwarrantable assumption that——

(SAUNDERS *looks round, sees* LADY RUSHMERE, *and takes a step or two back to below table, in astonishment.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Hope I don't interrupt you—Budgen tells me the hats have come.

PREEDY. (*nervously*) Yes, your ladyship, they have.

LADY RUSHMERE. (*to* HARRIET *who is above table R.C.*) Where are they?

HARRIET. In the bedroom, my lady. (*crosses round above* LADY RUSHMERE *and back of settee to bedroom door, which she opens*)

LADY RUSHMERE. All right—I'll go and try them on. (*she crosses in front of* PREEDY *over to bedroom—to* PREEDY) I should like your opinion before I decide—the looking-glass in the bedroom is none of the biggest.

PREEDY. (*nervously*) Oh, I couldn't presume to influence your selection.

LADY RUSHMERE. That's rot, two heads are better than one, though mine's going to wear the hat.

(SAUNDERS *gives an ironical snort.*)

(LADY RUSHMERE *goes into bedroom, followed by*
HARRIET.)

(*Slight pause—the two men look at each other.*)

SAUNDERS. Mr. Preedy, a few moments ago you described yourself as a lonely man, leading a lonely life.

PREEDY. What if I did?

SAUNDERS. Well, even the most dissipated London man——

PREEDY. How dare you apply that description to me. How dare you!

SAUNDERS. I didn't, but if you think the cap—or rather the hat—fits you, you're free to wear it.

PREEDY. You are again displaying your ignorance of modern business methods. That lady whom you saw just now has entire control of our millinery department.

SAUNDERS. It's my conviction that the whole thing's a "try on" in more senses than one—it *won't* do, Mr. Preedy.

PREEDY. What won't do?

SAUNDERS. I noticed that both you and your *nominal* housekeeper——

PREEDY. Nominal is most offensive.

(*Door bell ready.*)

SAUNDERS. You both addressed her by the title of "your ladyship." I find you masquerading as a respectable man, with ladies of title trying on hats in your bedroom.

PREEDY. And where better?

SAUNDERS. I should like to have Mr. Sidgrave's view on that point.

(Door bell rings.)

PREEDY. Then go to Mr. Sidgrave—I shall be ready to answer any questions.

SAUNDERS. Oh yes! and while I'm gone the lady will be smuggled away and you'll have strung together a fresh bundle of lies. I won't go. *(banging his hat on the table and going below it to fireplace and sitting on club fender)*

PREEDY. You won't what?

SAUNDERS. I won't go.

(BILSON comes in from hall, shutting the door.)

PREEDY. If you don't leave at once I shall direct my man to fetch a policeman. *(to BILSON.)* What is it?

BILSON. Lord Kinslow and Lord Rushmere have called and say they must see you at once on private and important business.

PREEDY. Good heavens!

BILSON. Shall I show 'em in?

PREEDY. No—wait—not for minute. *(comes to back of chair R.C.)* Mr. Saunders, two gentlemen have called on business, which is both private and impor-

tant. Will you get out now (*picking up hat and after instinctively glancing at the maker's name, offering it to SAUNDERS*) and come back later on?

SAUNDERS. I decline to do anything of the sort.

BILSON. They seemed a bit impatient.

PREEDY. Go and pacify them. (*replacing hat on the table and going up R.C.*)

(*BILSON goes off into hall.*)

Mr. Saunders, what will my visitors think?

SAUNDERS. Well, when they see their host's costume, they'll probably think he's been making a night of it.

PREEDY. (C.) Good gracious! Yes, I can't see them like this. I am obliged to you for your sneering reminder.

(*BILSON comes in quickly, again closing the door.*)

BILSON. Lord Kinslow and Lord Rushmere would be glad to know how much longer you're likely to be.

PREEDY. I can't say to a minute or two——

(*BILSON goes up and sits in chair R. of hall door.*)

Mr. Saunders, if you intend to adopt the unmanly course of remaining where you're not wanted, will you do so in another room?

SAUNDERS. (*taking up hat and going to drawing-room door*) Well, if I make this concession, it is not in any friendly spirit.

PREEDY. That's quite understood—will you go in there? (*pointing to drawing-room*)

SAUNDERS. (*moving towards drawing-room door*)

R.U.E.) I will—but I wish I could have you for a quarter of an hour in my red velvet chair.

PREEDY. Your threats have no terror for me—I always take gas.

(SAUNDERS goes into drawing-room.)

At last—thank goodness! (*by chair L. of table*)

BILSON. (*rising and coming L.C.*) Now can I show in the two gentlemen? They were beginning to make themselves very unpleasant——

PREEDY. I can't help it—I can't see them like this. (*partly takes off his coat, crossing BILSON and going towards bedroom door*)

BILSON. You ain't going to fight 'em, are you?

PREEDY. No. (*knocking at bedroom door*) Your ladyship—here, what am I doing? (*replacing coat again, but leaving one arm out*)

(HARRIET comes out.)

Oh, Budgen, will you go—with her ladyship's permission—to my hanging cupboard and bring me a coat and—things—anything that's there—and if you see a necktie anywhere about—I should be glad of that too.

HARRIET. Yes, sir.

PREEDY. Thank you.

(HARRIET goes off.)

BILSON. You know those two gents have been waiting a good time in the passage.

PREEDY. I know—I know—(*putting other arm in*

coat) you'll have to bring them in here, while I change my things in your pantry.

BILSON. Everybody seems to change their things in my pantry.

(HARRIET comes out with coat, trousers and small necktie.)

HARRIET. Are these what you want, sir?

PREEDY. Eh? Yes, those'll do, thank you.

(She goes off into bedroom.)

Oh dear, oh dear—(having taken things) flannel trousers for week-ends at the seaside and no waistcoat . . . well, I can't wait now. Show in Lord Kinslow and Lord Rushmere—(moving round R. of settee towards pantry door and undoing his collar and tie) and tell them I'll be with them almost immediately.

(They are both going.)

BILSON. I think I mentioned I leave this day month? (at hall door)

PREEDY. Yes, you did; it's the only pleasant thought I have to cling to.

(He goes off into pantry.)

(BILSON goes into hall, returns immediately, stands R. of door, showing in LORD KINSLOW and LORD RUSHMERE. KINSLOW enters first, followed by RUSHMERE. KINSLOW brings on hat and stick—RUSHMERE neither.)

LORD RUSHMERE. Are we to understand that after keeping us for ten minutes—

LORD KINSLOW. Twelve minutes and a half by my watch. (*coming down R. below table*)

LORD RUSHMERE. (*coming L.C.*) Yes, that's all right—for twelve minutes and a half—in a draughty passage—with nothing to sit down upon except an umbrella stand—Do you mean to say that Mr. Preedy isn't ready to see us now?

BILSON. (C.) Mr. Preedy desired me to mention that he would be with you almost immediate.

LORD RUSHMERE. Then have the goodness to tell Mr. Preedy we're not here for fun.

LORD KINSLOW. Yes, yes! I suppose your master is not endeavouring to shirk the interview by departing down the back stairs, or anything of that kind?

LORD RUSHMERE. By George, he'd better not.

LORD KINSLOW. No.

LORD RUSHMERE. Where is he? And what's he doing?

BILSON. He's in the pantry changing his things.

(*BILSON goes into hall.*)

LORD RUSHMERE. Changing his things?

LORD KINSLOW. And in the pantry—why the pantry?

LORD RUSHMERE. Rotten business all round. I've a feeling the whole affair's going to be damned nasty.

LORD KINSLOW. The outlook certainly appears somewhat gloomy. (*going to fire-place*)

LORD RUSHMERE. We've got to face the fact that

my giddy aunt-in-law has evidently mixed herself up with a full-fledged bounder.

LORD KINSLOW. (*placing hat on sideboard up R. and walking-stick by fire-place*) Don't let us prejudge the situation—bounder is a harsh term.

LORD RUSHMERE. Prejudged be hanged! Of course he's a bounder; when do you find a decent chap changing his togs in the pantry?

LORD KINSLOW. (*crossing above table to chair L. of table*) Admitting that your view of this Mr. Preedy is correct, it only makes Joanna's course of action the more remarkable.

LORD RUSHMERE. (*sitting on the settee with his left leg stretched fully along the seat*) There's a good bit to be said the other way. Your son Bob Jennerway takes a trip to Cairo with a travelling companion, in case he should be dull.

(LORD KINSLOW *sits L. of table R.C.*)

I expect Aunt Jo has had about enough of that sort of thing; this man Preedy chipped in at the right moment, and the fat's in the fire.

LORD KINSLOW. I have no desire to exonerate my unhappy son.

LORD RUSHMERE. Unhappy? *He's* happy enough—all the trouble and worry comes our way—that's what's so beastly unfair, upon my soul, I'm—almost sorry that her lawyer put me on their track.

LORD KINSLOW. How did the question arise—did he send for you?

LORD RUSHMERE. No, I went round to see Philip-

son—that's my legal chap's name—about my own little kick-up, which is coming on directly, (*spreading his legs*) and he happens to be Aunt Jo's man of law too, and having heard she'd vanished into thin air, don't you know, I put it to him whether he'd got any notion of her present whereabouts. Well, after fooling about a bit, he let out to me that all her letters were to be forwarded to this address, care of Hamilton Preedy. Of course, I asked a few leading questions which he couldn't or wouldn't answer, but it didn't take me long to——

LORD KINSLOW. Put two and two together.

LORD RUSHMERE. No—to put one and one together, so I thought I'd beter let you know how things stood.

LORD KINSLOW. Naturally—obviously—but I cannot think Joanna would link her fate with an individual so wanting in refinement as your estimate would imply. (*rises*)

LORD RUSHMERE. The cove may have points—in a middle-class kind of way—he may very likely be a good-looking well set up chap.

(LORD KINSLOW goes to fire-place.)

What I'm afraid is that the Rushmere family will be absorbing too much public attention—for this to come along just now, when I happen to be bringing a little divorce of my own. (*rises, crosses to chair L. of table R.C. and sits*) 'Pon my soul, Kinslow, it takes all the heart out of one. (*leans his head on his right hand, his right elbow on table*)

LORD KINSLOW. I'm afraid we are not standing on very firm ground—it may be judicious to avoid any display of resentment, or temper——

LORD RUSHMERE. (*turning to him in a temper*) Temper? What do you mean by temper?

LORD KINSLOW. My dear Rushmere, I mean nothing personal, but as a distinguished prelate is reported to have said, “In all temporal difficulties let us keep our heads cool and our hearts warm”——

PREEDY *comes on from pantry. He is attired in light flannel trousers, morning coat and a coloured tie, evening-dress waistcoat.*)

LORD RUSHMERE. That's all right—I'll keep calm. (*turning in chair, seeing PREEDY*) Who the devil's this?

(LORD KINSLOW *comes down R.*)

PREEDY. Good day, my lord; am I addressing Lord Rushmere?

LORD RUSHMERE. I'm Lord Rushmere—(*rises*)

(PREEDY *bows.*)

—and this is Lord Kinslow.

(PREEDY *bows again.*)

We've come here to see Mr. Hamilton Preedy—I think that's his name—on business. (R.C.)

PREEDY. Quite so, my lord—I'm ready to attend to it. (L.C.)

LORD RUSHMERE. Very likely you are, but as our

business happens to be exceptional private, we shouldn't care to discuss it with an outsider.

PREEDY. My lord——

LORD RUSHMERE. We've come here to see Mr. Preedy—it's no kind of good his trying to shirk—we shall wait here, till we *do* see him, if we have to draw him like a badger.

PREEDY. I am Preedy.

LORD RUSHMERE. What?

LORD KINSLOW. (R.) Do we understand you, sir, to say that you are Preedy—er—Mr. Preedy?

PREEDY. My name is Hamilton Preedy.

(*They look at him in amazement for a moment or two and then turn and look at each other.*)

LORD RUSHMERE. (*to PREEDY*) Excuse me a minute. (*aside to LORD KINSLOW*) I'm damned—what? (*goes to LORD KINSLOW*) How does he strike you?

(*PREEDY wanders up stage, arranging his tie.*)

LORD KINSLOW. It's bewildering.

LORD RUSHMERE. But he's a worm—a third-class worm. (*looking at PREEDY*) Did you ever see such beastly togs? One needn't wonder that he changes them in the pantry.

LORD KINSLOW. His appearance certainly throws a painful light on Joanna's *mental* condition.

LORD RUSHMERE. Well, anyway, we've got to talk to him—Mr.—er—Preedy——

(*PREEDY turns.*)

(LORD RUSHMERE *returns to PREEDY, who has come down c.*)

PREEDY. Yes, my lord——

(LORD KINSLOW *stands with his back to fire-place.*)

LORD RUSHMERE. I've had an interview with Mr. Philipson,

(PREEDY *bows.*)

and in answer to certain inquiries I felt justified in making, he told me that any communication that I——

LORD KINSLOW. Or any other member of the family——(*coming below table*)

LORD RUSHMERE. Look here, Kinslow, we can't both do the talking.

(LORD KINSLOW *goes back to fire-place.*)

You know——we've been given to understand that any communication we wish to make to my aunt, Lady Rushmere, will have to go through you.

PREEDY (*with dignity*) That is so, my lord.

LORD RUSHMERE. Oh, is it?

LORD KINSLOW. (*again goes below table to PREEDY, Lady Rushmere——*)

LORD RUSHMERE. Oh! (*annoyed by LORD KINSLOW'S interference he goes, up*)

LORD KINSLOW. Lady Rushmere, for reasons into which I will not enter, has apparently gone into what I fear we must call—hiding.

PREEDY. That is so.

LORD KINSLOW. We were naturally anxious—you

can understand it would be so—we are naturally anxious.

LORD RUSHMERE. We shall be here all day.
(*coming down between LORD KINSLOW and PREEDY.*)

(LORD KINSLOW *returns to fire-place.*)

Look here, sir, you know Lady Rushmere's present address?

PREEDY. Possibly.

LORD RUSHMERE. Do you—or don't you?

PREEDY. I do!

LORD RUSHMERE. Well, we want to get into touch with her as soon as possible. So will you have the goodness to inform us where she's to be found?

PREEDY. On the whole—and after careful consideration, my lord—I won't.

LORD RUSHMERE. You won't what?

PREEDY. I won't have the goodness to inform you.

LORD RUSHMERE. Then you're a damned waster?

LORD KINSLOW. (*R. of table*) Rushmere, Rushmere—do let us keep our heads cool and our hearts warm.

(LORD RUSHMERE *groans annoyance and goes up stage.*)

What is your reason, Mr. Preedy, for this policy of reserve?

PREEDY. I am acting in accordance with her ladyship's wishes. Her ladyship has no desire to resume relations with—any of her relations.

LORD RUSHMERE. What?

PREEDY. She is beginning life again—and when the law has intervened on her behalf—it is probable that she will form other and less disreputable ties.

(KINSLOW and RUSHMERE stare in astonishment at PREEDY.)

An honest and upright man, whose name at this stage I will not mention, is anxious to come to her rescue, and when the necessary time has elapsed will guide her into the peaceful haven provided by his name and home.

(Slight pause.)

LORD RUSHMERE. Oh, will he? (turning to LORD KINSLOW) 'Pon my solemn soul—what? (to PREEDY) Look here, Mr. Thingummy, when you start talking of disreputable ties, one needn't look higher than your collar to see you're a bit of an authority—but when you favour us with a lot of drivel about upright men and hearths and homes, you're reckoning a whole farmyard of imaginary chickens.

PREEDY. I don't think so.

LORD RUSHMERE. You talk about legal proceedings—can't you realize that if you and my aunt go to work on your present lines you'll find yourselves taking tea with the King's Proctor? (goes up c.)

LORD KINSLOW. (R. of table, speaking across it to PREEDY) Of course, Mr. Preedy, we have no difficulty in identifying the individual whom you modestly describe as honest and upright.

LORD RUSHMERE. No! (*by chair L. of tab'e*)

LORD KINSLOW. I assume we may take it that when my daughter-in-law, Lady Rushmere, has obtained her freedom, *you hope* to occupy the position vacated by my son.

PREEDY. Well, no—you mustn't assume that.

LORD RUSHMERE. What!

PREEDY. The fact is, I'm placed rather awkwardly. I must beg you not to link our names together in any way. I have the highest esteem for Lady Rushmere, and when that injured lady obtains legal release, I have practically no doubt that an honest, upright man will be waiting for her—but it won't be me. (*laughing nervously*) Ha, ha, not me.

(LORD KINSLOW *sinks, dismayed, into chair R. of table.*)

LORD RUSHMERE. (*after slight pause, to LORD KINSLOW*) What do you say to that, Kinslow? He won't even pledge himself to marry her.

LORD KINSLOW. Really, Mr. Preedy, you pain me—you shock me—the tone of levity you adopt in discussing the most solemn obligations of honour and duty——

LORD RUSHMERE. Good heavens, Kinslow! Here, let me talk to him. Now, sir, I go back to the starting point, and I may warn you, you're walking very near the outside edge of my patience. Will you or won't you give us Lady Rushmere's present address?

PREEDY. I will not.

LORD KINSLOW. Is she still in England?

PREEDY. Her present temporary residence is accessible—but remote.

LORD RUSHMERE. (*taking his hat*) Come along, Kinslow.

(LORD KINSLOW *picks up hat and stick and goes above table to hall door, where he joins RUSHMERE.*

PREEDY *also goes to door on their L.*)

Let me tell you this, sir—I'll have you shadowed, and you may think yourself damned lucky that, thanks to my coming round here in a hurry, I happened to forget to bring a horsewhip.

(*At this they turn to go. All three men are facing the door and in a line. They turn sharply to their left on hearing LADY RUSHMERE.*)

(LADY RUSHMERE *comes in from bedroom in another hat.*)

(*to LORD KINSLOW*) Here, let's get along.

(*They are going.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. (*to L. of settee, down stage*)
How does this look?

(*The three men turn and see her. Picture. Slight pause.*)

LORD KINSLOW. Joanna! (*going above table to fire-place*)

LORD RUSHMERE. Oh, that's it, is it? (*remaining up c.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Hullo, Rush! have you turned up. (*crosses below settee to chair L. of table R.C. Sits*) Good day, Lord Kinslow.

LORD RUSHMERE. Yes, auntie dear.

(LORD RUSHMERE comes down to L. of LADY RUSHMERE. PREEDY goes behind settee to L. and so to front of it.)

I have turned up—at some little personal inconvenience. As you came in you said, “How does this look?” Well, if you want my opinion, I should say the whole thing looks damned disreputable.

LADY RUSHMERE. Thanks; as it happens I don’t want your opinion—I’ve no use for it. My question was addressed to Mr. Preedy. How is Lady Kinslow?

LORD KINSLOW. Very far from well. (*speaking across the table*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Ah, Marienbad’s about due, isn’t it? Heard from Bob?

LORD KINSLOW. We have not.

LADY RUSHMERE. You soon will. When he left he was as stony as a country road, so I don’t fancy he’ll get very far up the Nile without your fatherly assistance. (*slight pause*)

LORD KINSLOW. He will receive no financial help from me; but I didn’t call here in order to discuss Robert.

LADY RUSHMERE. No? Then to what are we indebted for the pleasure of this visit?

LORD KINSLOW. We! We, Joanna? You permit yourself the shameless use of the word "*we*"?

LADY RUSHMERE. What's the matter with it? You see, you've taken us by surprise; if we'd known you were coming we'd have put up our new window curtains.

(LORD KINSLOW and LORD RUSHMERE utter a groan.

LORD RUSHMERE turns up stage.)

(to PREEDY) Wouldn't we?

PREEDY. I should have been delighted to do honour to any relatives of your ladyship's.

LADY RUSHMERE. There, isn't he a kind little chap? What were you talking about when I came in?

LORD RUSHMERE. That's soon answered. Thanks to Philipson we ran Mr. Preedy to earth; he fed us up with lies until we were nearly sick, and just then you came on the scene.

LORD KINSLOW. That—that gentleman informed us that your present residence was accessible but remote——

(PREEDY coughs nervously, R. of table.)

LADY RUSHMERE. I was in the bedroom trying on hats. (seated L. of table)

LORD RUSHMERE. That's a nice admission (coming down C.) (to her) Can't you see, aunt, that your behaviour with that man there is not only discreditable—it's beastly inopportune; just at the moment when my divorce is coming along, you take a header into the papers—it ain't playing the game.

LADY RUSHMERE. I like your cheek, Rushmere. Because you've engaged the Divorce Court for a series of *matinées*, that's no reason why you should expect to keep it for the entire season !

LORD RUSHMERE. (*loudly*) Well then, I've just got this to say——

LORD KINSLOW. Rushmere, Rushmere, do let us again recall the clerical suggestion that we should keep——

LORD RUSHMERE. Oh lord, yes, we know all about that ! Heads cool, feet warm. You see, aunt, we came here in a conciliatory, affectionate spirit. (*angrily*)

LADY RUSHMERE. That's quite evident.

LORD RUSHMERE. (*across table to her*) Why not give *propriety* a show for once in a way, come and stay with me.

LADY RUSHMERE. Thanks !

LORD KINSLOW. Or why not come to us ? Lady Kinslow will be charmed to welcome you.

LADY RUSHMERE. Did she say so ?

LORD KINSLOW. We have not actually discussed the question, but I know what her feeling would be.

LADY RUSHMERE. So do I. Both your offers of hospitality are very tempting, but I prefer Mr. Preedy's.

PREEDY. Particularly gratifying. (*by settee L.C.*)

LORD RUSHMERE. Gratifying be damned ! (*he is on LADY RUSHMERE'S L.*) Then go your own road—it's a bit muddy—still that's your look out,

but I suppose you realize that when you're a free woman—if you ever are—Mr. Preedy don't intend to marry you. I happen to know, because he said so himself.

LADY RUSHMERE. Did he? Ah, but when he said that he hadn't seen me in this hat.

(LORD KINSLOW and LORD RUSHMERE utter groans of despair. LORD KINSLOW goes up R. by side-board, LORD RUSHMERE goes up C.)

LADY RUSHMERE. That's all right, Mr. Preedy, there's a lot too much marriage nowadays; we're getting along very nicely as we are, and when the time comes I'm sure you wouldn't break my heart would you?

(LORD KINSLOW has returned to fire-place.)

PREEDY. (L.C. by settee) Certainly not, your ladyship. I shouldn't presume to take such a liberty.

LADY RUSHMERE. There, I told you he was quite a nice little man. (rising) Good-bye, Lord Kinslow.

(LORD KINSLOW takes hat and stick and joins LORD RUSHMERE by hall door, going above table.)

Good-bye, Rush. Mr. Preedy and I won't detain you, because two's company and four's a crowd. (goes to fire-place below table, takes cigarette from box on mantelpiece, lights and smokes it)

LORD RUSHMERE. Come along, Kinslow, it's a clear case of ghastly rotten infatuation.

(LORD RUSHMERE and LORD KINSLOW have turned to go. They are by the hall door, RUSHMERE L., KINSLOW R.)

(SAUNDERS comes on hastily.)

SAUNDERS. Stop! Now I understand everything.

LORD RUSHMERE. Oh, do you? And who are you? (turning to SAUNDERS)

(The positions are as follows: LORD KINSLOW is by the chair R. of hall door. LORD RUSHMERE is on LORD KINSLOW's left and close to him. SAUNDERS is on LORD KINSLOW's right, some little distance from him. He goes close to KINSLOW at "I will not leave the apartment," so that LORD KINSLOW is really hemmed in between SAUNDERS and LORD RUSHMERE, who talk to each other across him. PREEDY is down stage L.C. LADY RUSHMERE is by the fire-place.)

SAUNDERS. My name—is Saunders.

PREEDY. Mr. Reginald Saunders, dental surgeon.

SAUNDERS. I am a dental surgeon. I've no wish to deny it.

LORD RUSHMERE. I don't care a damn who or what you are. Lord Kinslow and I have just finished some very painful family business, and we're going.

SAUNDERS. For the moment, my lord, I must insist on your remaining.

LORD RUSHMERE. What the devil do you mean,

sir? If you're cadging for patients I've got a tooth man of my own in Portland Place.

PREEDY. Leave the apartment, Mr. Saunders.

SAUNDERS. I will not leave the apartment! For the last twenty minutes I have been in that drawing-room with my ear to the keyhole.

LORD RUSHMERE. Then you're a dirty eaves-dropper!

PREEDY. Quit my flat, Mr. Saunders.

SAUNDERS. I will not quit your flat till I choose. Lord Rushmere, and Lord Kinslow, I call you both to witness that that man there——

(Slight pause. SAUNDERS close to LORD KINSLOW and LORD RUSHMERE.)

LORD RUSHMERE. Well?

SAUNDERS. That man, Hamilton Preedy—is—a profligate.

LORD RUSHMERE. Oh—Lord goodness! we know that—of course we know he's a profligate. You don't suppose we called round to hear him say his catechism—and if he is, what business is it of yours?

SAUNDERS. I make it my business, my lord, because of my loyal, devoted love for Emma.

LORD RUSHMERE. Emma—who's Emma?

PREEDY. Mr. Saunders, I——

(Door slam ready.)

SAUNDERS. *(talking into LORD KINSLOW'S face)* And when I leave here I go straight to Mr. Sidgrave.

LORD KINSLOW. Who is Sidgrave?

LORD RUSHMERE. What's it matter who he is ?
Come on, Kinslow, don't let's waste any more time
with these babbling bounders.

(LORD RUSHMERE and LORD KINSLOW turn to go.)

PREEDY. Get out, you scoundrel !

SAUNDERS. Don't you talk to me like that.
(*shaking his finger at PREEDY*)

(SAUNDERS hastily goes to PREEDY who is down stage
by settee, crossing LORD RUSHMERE in order to do
so. PREEDY seizes SAUNDERS by the shoulders
in order to propel him towards the door.)

PREEDY. You get out ! (*pushing SAUNDERS.*
He has both arms right round SAUNDERS.)

SAUNDERS. Don't you dare to touch me. (*As he*
is being moved) I'll appeal to the law.

PREEDY. You can think that over at the bottom
of my stone staircase.

(LORD KINSLOW and LORD RUSHMERE (*he L.*) have
turned at the door when they hear the dispute between
SAUNDERS and PREEDY, who rushes SAUNDERS
off between LORD RUSHMERE and LORD KINSLOW,
who are mutually thrown off their balance.)

LORD KINSLOW. Dear me—dear me ! (*is can-*
noned into chair R. of door)

LORD RUSHMERE. Take care where you're com-
ing to. (*dancing about in agony, SAUNDERS having*
trodden on his foot.)

(RUSHMERE aims wild blows through hall door and

his elbow knocks down large JAPANESE vase off a pedestal standing near—vase breaks. PREEDY and SAUNDERS are heard scuffling off L. Door bangs violently. LORD RUSHMERE leans helplessly against the pedestal gazing at the broken vase.)

LORD KINSLOW. This episode supplies a fitting climax to a disgusting interview. (*breathlessly*)

LORD RUSHMERE. Filthy! I've broken his beastly vase.

(PREEDY enters with tie undone, waistcoat half open, hair dishevelled. He is utterly exhausted. He gropes his way in aimlessly, passing his right hand across LORD KINSLOW'S head and sinks into chair L. of table. During this LADY RUSHMERE has been seated on the club fender—she is smoking a cigarette.)


Well, sir, if you've quite finished scrapping with that friend of yours, we wish you good morning. I've had a slight accident with a bit of your china, which shall be replaced in the course of the day.

PREEDY. It's not of the slightest consequence, Lord Rushmere—pray don't think of it.

(*Curtain warning.*)

LORD RUSHMERE. I'm going to think of it; you're not at all the kind of person to whom I should care to be under any sort of obligation. After you, Kinslow.

(LORD RUSHMERE and LORD KINSLOW go out.)

 (PREEDY remains seated L. of table.)

PREEDY. I hope you'll pardon me, Lady Rushmere, for my momentary display of violence, but I was very much put out.

LADY RUSHMERE. It seemed to me it was the other chap who was put out. (*sits R. of table*) I thought you did it wonderful well.

PREEDY. And now, what would your ladyship like to do? After all this painful excitement you might wish to lie down for a little.

LADY RUSHMERE. Thanks, I think not; I don't feel inclined to go back to that bed prematurely. Suppose you take me somewhere and give me a bit of lunch?

PREEDY. Most delightful suggestion; but I understood from Mr. Bounsall that restaurants are prohibited. I know a quiet confectioner's just off Sloane Street where I occasionally indulge in a mid-day chop.

LADY RUSHMERE. It sounds reckless.

PREEDY. But, after all, why should we go out? I will order luncheon to be prepared at once. (*rises and goes above table to top of fire-place. Goes over to bell, rings it, returning to C.*) I'm afraid I can't guarantee a very elaborate banquet, my cook is not a cordon bleu, but she's a faithful domestic who understands all my little ways.

(*BILSON comes in from pantry.*)

(*to BILSON*) Tell cook to prepare luncheon at once.

BILSON. Cook has left.

PREEDY. What?

BILSON. She asked me to mention that she was a respectable woman, and she's left.

(BILSON goes quietly off into pantry.)

(Slight pause. They look at each other.)

LADY RUSHMERE. Evidently the faithful creature included me among your little ways and her fidelity wouldn't stand the strain.

PREEDY. Most unfortunate; what are we to do?

(LADY RUSHMERE rises leisurely.)

LADY RUSHMERE. It's the hand of destiny, Mr. Preedy; let's go and have a midday chop. (she is below table R.C.)

(PREEDY goes to desk L., picks up his hat, joins LADY RUSHMERE down stage, places his hat on his head, offers his left arm to LADY RUSHMERE and they exeunt, arm in arm as the curtain falls.)

(Note: The hall door is not closed after LORD KINSLOW and LORD RUSHMERE exit.)

CURTAIN.



ACT III

Same scene.—Evening.

Blinds drawn. Electric sconces alight. Ash-tray and open magazine on table R.C.

(LADY RUSHMERE and PREEDY are discovered.
LADY RUSHMERE sitting on the settee and PREEDY L.
of table R.C.)

LADY RUSHMERE. What's about the time?
(has a copy of the "Globe" newspaper)

PREEDY. (looking at his watch) Nearly half-past nine, Lady Rushmere.

LADY RUSHMERE. So late as that? What do you suppose has happened to Mr. Bounsall? He ought to have been able to soothe half a dozen god-fathers by now.

PREEDY. I wish I could mitigate the tedium of waiting. I was wondering if there was any two-handed game of chance that might amuse your ladyship. I believe I have a draught-board somewhere, (rising) but I'm afraid a few of the men are missing. (sitting again)

LADY RUSHMERE. There's always cat's-cradle—but perhaps we'd better hold it in reserve. Really

the whole day has been such a whirl of pleasure and excitement, it might be well to slow down a bit.

PREEDY. (*with a gratified smile*) Your ladyship is alluding to our visit to Kew Gardens after lunch?

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes!

PREEDY. Your ladyship obviously needed exercise and change of scene, but in view of your incognito I didn't dare to risk either the British Museum or the National Gallery, and even with the care we took to avoid observation, it seemed to me that we excited a little attention—doubtless your ladyship's charming costume——

LADY RUSHMERE. You're not quite fair to yourself. I think your own costume a little contributed.

PREEDY. It was terrible, wasn't it? I didn't realize the tragic general effect till I caught sight of myself in a shop window.

LADY RUSHMERE. Why did we drive to Kew Gardens in a four-wheeled cab?

PREEDY. Of course, we could have gone by train, if it had not been for the publicity.

LADY RUSHMERE. Ah well, it filled out the afternoon, and on the way I recognized for the first time what a number of people do their washing at home.

PREEDY. It was a terrible disappointment to me—on your ladyship's account—to find that the Cactus House is only open to the public on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

LADY RUSHMERE. Life is made up of disappointments.

PREEDY. Yes—and I'm afraid the word disappointment included the tea at the "Cyclist's Rest." Your ladyship will think me a very poor caterer. I'm quite ashamed when I remember that, thanks to the departure of my cook, your evening meal consisted of rolled tongue and three-cornered puffs.

LADY RUSHMERE. Oh, that was all right. There was something I wanted to ask you. What was the real trouble this morning with your friend—Mr.—Saunders, wasn't it?

PREEDY. His name is Saunders. (*rising and going nearer to LADY RUSHMERE*) He's not a friend of mine—he's a dentist.

LADY RUSHMERE. He seemed annoyed. I hope Rushmere and Kinslow didn't interrupt you just as you were going to have a tooth out?

PREEDY. Oh no, he's not at all the kind of man I should employ professionally.

(*LADY RUSHMERE gives PREEDY the newspaper, which he takes and places on table. L. Then comes down L. to foot of settee at back.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. He seemed to be a person of rather strict views. Didn't I catch the word profligate?

PREEDY. Yes—(*leaning over back of settee*) he was referring to me. There happens to be a young lady to whom I am very much attached—her name is Sidgrave. Well, Mr. Saunders has also been paying

attentions to her, but she seems to prefer me to Saunders. He called on me this morning, and while he was making himself unpleasant you happened to come into the room, and being a man of evil mind, he placed a most unjustifiable construction on your presence here which——

LADY RUSHMERE. Which he shares with Budgen and the butler—and, of course, the cook. But I suppose Mr. Saunders doesn't matter, does he?

PREEDY. Well, I fear it is his intention to confide his suspicions to Mr. Sidgrave—(*coming down and sitting on lower end of settee*) Emma's father.

LADY RUSHMERE. And would Mr. Sidgrave be likely to share them?

PREEDY. Of course he and Mrs. Sidgrave are just a little old-fashioned—at the same time, I'm certain—(*slight pause*) oh, yes, quite certain—I shall ultimately make them all understand.

LADY RUSHMERE. Mr. Preedy, you've just given me a new experience, and one that Nature never intended—you've made me feel small.

PREEDY. Oh, pray don't say that.

LADY RUSHMERE. I'm afraid some of us have a way of driving our motors over other people's feelings—but if I'd had the faintest notion I was upsetting things between you and your best and brightest girl, I'd have seen Mr. Bounsall in—in a very warm climate—before I'd have let him play up such a rotten game as this.

(They both rise. LADY RUSHMERE goes R.C.)

PREEDY. Lady Rushmere! (L.C.)

LADY RUSHMERE. For nearly twenty-four hours I've been a parcel to be left here till called for—and my temporary owner has apparently lost the ticket—anyhow, it's time I re-directed the label to some other address.

PREEDY. May I beg you to listen to me, Lady Rushmere? *(going C.)*

LADY RUSHMERE. I'm going to give Mr. Bounsall another twenty minutes—just enough time to pack my things—and then I'm off.

PREEDY. What could I say to Mr. Bounsall?

LADY RUSHMERE. Tell him I wouldn't stop.

PREEDY. I owe a great deal to Mr. Bounsall, and if I were to desert the trust which he confided to me, I don't believe I should ever dare to look at myself again in my own shaving-glass.

LADY RUSHMERE. When you talk of what you owe to Mr. Bounsall, you mustn't forget that Miss Sidgrave is your principal creditor—and I don't mean you to go through the court on my account.

(HARRIET knocks off. Bedroom door.)

Was that a knock at the door?

PREEDY. I think it was. Come in!

(HARRIET comes out of bedroom. PREEDY strolls up C.)

LADY RUSHMERE. Oh, is that you, Budgen? What is it?

HARRIET. I thought I would ask if your ladyship would require me again this evening. (*at foot of settee L.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. As it happens I shall. Get all my things together and put them into my trunk, (R.C.)

PREEDY. Oh, your ladyship. (*returning C.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. We shall be leaving here in the course of half an hour.

PREEDY. If your ladyship would only allow me to say——

LADY RUSHMERE. That's all right, Mr. Preedy—we settled all that. (*crosses to HARRIET*) Attend to it at once, will you, Budgen?

(HARRIET *turns to go.*)

and——

(HARRIET *stops.*)

if you have occasion to see me again during the interval, you needn't knock at the door.

HARRIET. (*rather impudently*) I thought I might be disturbing your ladyship and Mr. Preedy.

LADY RUSHMERE. You were engaged to think respectfully. That'll do. (*watches HARRIET go right off*)

(HARRIET *goes L. I. E.*)

PREEDY. Lady Rushmere—if you leave my modest abode—you will, I fear, be like a ship that has slipped its moorings.

LADY RUSHMERE. (L.C.) I shall be all right—
don't you worry yourself.

PREEDY. It's my duty to worry myself—

(BILSON comes in from hall.)

(going below table R.C.) And, of course, till the last
moment I shall cling to the hope of Mr. Bounsall's
return.

BILSON. Miss Sidgrave has called to see you.

PREEDY. Miss Sidgrave! Emma! Is she
alone?

BILSON. Yes, she is alone; and I shall be glad if
you can suit yourself by the end of the week.

(During this LADY RUSHMERE goes L. to back of the
settee.)

LADY RUSHMERE. Very fortunate. (to BILSON)
Show in Miss Sidgrave.

(BILSON goes off into hall.)

PREEDY. But Mr. Bounsall wished your lady-
ship to remain unknown to everybody.

LADY RUSHMERE. Never mind about that.

(BILSON comes in, followed by EMMA from hall.)

BILSON. Miss Sidgrave.

(BILSON goes off into hall, closing door.)

(EMMA advances.)

PREEDY. (advancing to her) Emma dear.

EMMA. Oh, Hamilton, I don't know what you'll
think. I had to come—I—. (seeing LADY RUSH-

HERE) I didn't know you had some one with you
(*up C.*)

PREEDY. Yes, dear—this is—this—er—— (*by chair L. of table*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Mr. Preedy, will you make me known to Miss Sidgrave? (*L.C. above settee*)

PREEDY. Of course, if your ladyship insists. Emma, this is—the Countess of Rushmere.

LADY RUSHMERE. (*advances to EMMA and holds out her hand*) How do you do?

(*EMMA takes it timidly.*)

I'm very glad to meet you. I dare say my being here seems rather odd to you—it does to me.

EMMA. Oh, not at all, Lady Rushmere. I know I oughtn't to be here myself.

LADY RUSHMERE. Where's papa and mamma?

EMMA. Papa is dining out—

(*LADY RUSHMERE strolls to lower end of settee.*)

and mamma is with an invalid relative. (*turns to PREEDY*)

(*LADY RUSHMERE moves away to L., to back of settee.*)

I had to come, Hamilton—because Reginald Saunders——

PREEDY. Brute!

EMMA. Came round to see papa—and papa was out, so I saw him—and he said dreadful things about you.

PREEDY. Beast!

EMMA. He said——

LADY RUSHMERE. We can guess what he said. Mr. Preedy, I'm going to see how Budgen is getting on with my packing; while I'm gone, will you let Miss Sidgrave know how matters really stand, and knock the stuffing out of Mr. Saunders? (*strolling towards bedroom*) I shall hope to see you again, Miss Sidgrave, before I go.

(*Goes into bedroom, L. 1. E.*)

PREEDY. Now, Emma dearest, (*indicates settee*) tell me about this hound.

(*They both sit on settee, PREEDY on her R.*)

EMMA. Oh, he said he'd been to see you, and that you were leading a reckless life of dissipation—and when at last he went away, he said he meant to come back later in the evening and tell papa—and after he was gone I couldn't bear the suspense any longer—so I came round to you.

PREEDY. You did perfectly right—as a matter of fact, I had never met the Countess of Rushmere till late last evening. It's a long story, but you can see for yourself the——

EMMA. Of course I believe it, especially since I've seen Lady Rushmere.

PREEDY. The whole idea's absurd; why, if I could have had the impertinent assurance to regard her ladyship in the light Mr. Saunders implies, I should have had to stand up on a chair.

(*BILSON comes in from hall.*)

I can explain to Mr. Sidgrave.

BILSON. There's some one to see you ; he won't give his name.

(EMMA and PREEDY exchange an apprehensive glance.)

PREEDY. (to BILSON, looking at him) Who is this man ?

BILSON. I couldn't say—he had his collar turned up.

EMMA. Do you think it's—— (looking at PREEDY anxiously)

PREEDY. I'm afraid it seems rather probable. (going up to door R.) Never mind, dear—you go into my drawing-room.

(EMMA crosses to R. above table.)

EMMA. Oh, must I ?

PREEDY. Yes, just for a minute or two. (to BILSON) Show him in.

(BILSON goes off into hall.)

EMMA. Oh, if he were to hurt you !

PREEDY. That is very unlikely. I kicked him out this morning, and I can kick him out to-night. Don't you worry. I'll come to you directly. (R.C. up stage)

(EMMA goes into drawing-room R.U.E.)

(BILSON comes in followed by BOUNSALL, who has his collar turned up and his hat well over his eyes.)

BILSON. Some one to see you.

(PREEDY pushes BILSON aside.)

PREEDY. (*turning hastily*) Now, what the devil do you mean by coming here again?

BOUNSALL. (*removing his hat and coat and giving them to BILSON, who exits into hall*) Not a very hospitable greeting, Preedy.

PREEDY. (*overjoyed*) Oh, good heavens, Mr. Bounsall! I thought you were Saunders.

BOUNSALL. Yes—well, I'm not Saunders. Lower your voice—there's no occasion to shout your welcome. (*speaking softly*) Where is Lady Rushmere?

PREEDY. She's in her bedroom—my bedroom—the bedroom.

(BOUNSALL takes PREEDY by the arm and brings him below table R. PREEDY goes to R. of table and immediately begins to fidget with ash-tray.)

BOUNSALL. Oh, then come over here. I don't want to disturb her at present. Can't we go into your drawing-room? I'm in sore need of a confidential chat with you.

PREEDY. I'm afraid the drawing-room is occupied. Oh, there is the pantry——

BOUNSALL. Pantry! I wonder you don't ask me to sit on the boiler and put my feet on the knife machine—we'll stay here and talk quietly. Sit down and listen to me.

(PREEDY sits R. of table. BOUNSALL L. of table.)

Since I saw you, Fate has materially altered the general situation. Listen to me!

(PREEDY *susbides on to the edge of a chair.*)

I reached Mr. Pottinger's residence at a very early hour this morning. I was taken up to his room, and found him propped up in bed—with a hospital nurse and doctor each side of it—and his lawyer, who had just completed the drawing up of two wills.

PREEDY. Two wills ?

BOUNSALL. Hush ! Two wills. They were awaiting his signature, the lawyer briefly explained, because Mr. Pottinger was only able to gasp at me affectionately. The lawyer explained that by one will I should inherit the whole of his vast property, saddled with a condition. By the other, the bulk of his money would have gone to found an asylum for idiots.

PREEDY. Idiots !

BOUNSALL. Idiots ! To insure—as the lawyer drily put it—that if I refused the condition my future might still be provided for.

(PREEDY *laughs.*)

What ?

PREEDY. Merely my sense of humour. What was the condition ?

BOUNSALL. Mr. Pottinger required that I should then and there contract a bedside marriage with the female relative of whom I spoke to you last evening.

PREEDY. Oh, good heavens ! I suppose she was there ?

BOUNSALL. There ! Of course she was there—

and so was Archdeacon Mathers, who had driven six miles and seemed to resent the loss of his night's rest.

PREEDY. Yes—well?

BOUNSALL. Well! You say well, but can your imagination grasp the problem that faced me—an elderly relative *in extremis*, anxious for reconciliation, sustained through the long hours by the hope—and a little Valentine's Meat Juice—but mainly by the hope that I should find myself able to meet his views—and that he could bequeath me his blessing and large fortune. Think of it, Preedy—two lace factories hanging in one scale, and my heavy liabilities in the other. What could I do? I ask you as a high-minded, right-feeling man.

PREEDY. You're very kind.

BOUNSALL. I was referring to myself; what could I do?

PREEDY. I suppose it was a little difficult.

BOUNSALL. To some men it might have been. I saw my duty plainly and rose to the dignity of the occasion. The marriage ceremony—which not even the sleepiness of Archdeacon Mathers could rob of its solemnity—was gone through. At the proper moment I placed on my wife's finger a curtain ring, which was the only one available, and we were irrevocably married.

(*Pause. The two men look at one another.*)

Well, Preedy, I am waiting for your assurance that under the peculiar circumstances I could not have acted differently.

PREEDY. I don't know whether it has escaped your recollection, but we have only casually referred to Lady Rushmere.

BOUNSALL. We will deal with that later; meanwhile I pause for your answer to my inquiry.

PREEDY. Well, Mr. Bounsall, it is difficult for me to view any action of yours in an unfavourable light.

BOUNSALL. (*with a smile*) Quite so.

PREEDY. But, of course, if any other man had gained the confidence of her ladyship, and had then betrayed it, I'm afraid I should have looked on him in the light of a contemptible ~~our~~.

BOUNSALL. (*leaning over the table*) Are you applying that term to me, and to my recent course of action?

PREEDY. Certainly not, Mr. Bounsall. I expressly guarded myself on that point; my comment is not directed to *your* recent course of action, but merely to the course of action of any *other* man who had done the same thing.

BOUNSALL. (*a little uncomfortably*) Oh! Well, my return to Nottingham must not be delayed.

(*They both rise.*)

It is my earnest desire to show every consideration for Lady Rushmere's feelings. I dare say I can arrange that my aunt's domicile in Hertfordshire may still be placed at her disposal. But a meeting between us might be productive of discomfort to

both. I will, therefore, leave the whole explanation to you. You will tell her?

PREEDY. No, I can't do that.

BOUNSALL. You can't?

PREEDY. No, Mr. Bounsall; if you wish Lady Rushmere to be informed of your marriage to some other person, you must tell her yourself.

BOUNSALL. You refuse to oblige me in this matter?

PREEDY. Mr. Bounsall, with every sentiment of undiminished respect, I'll see you damned first.

(BOUNSALL *is for the moment dumb with amazement.*

He then speaks very quietly.)

BOUNSALL. See me damned first?

PREEDY. Yes, and even after that eventuality I should still decline.

BOUNSALL. Preedy, you adopt a tone that is far less suited to the dignified commercial position in which my good nature has placed you, than to the itinerant sale of wheelks. (*buttons up coat*) I will myself communicate with Lady Rushmere in writing, but (*moves to settee for his cap*) I cannot remain another moment under your roof. (*he turns to go up to door*)

(PREEDY *rapidly goes above table to door and intercepts him. They are both by the door leading to the hall and BOUNSALL is on PREEDY'S L.*)

PREEDY. No, you don't!

BOUNSALL. Don't what, sir?

PREEDY. You don't leave here till this matter's settled.

BOUNSALL. Preedy, don't tempt me to forget the difference in our respective physiques.

PREEDY. If I'm prepared to ignore it, I don't think you need mind.

BOUNSALL. Stand out of the way, sir, and let me pass. (*endeavouring to go*)

(*PREEDY clasps him round the waist.*)

PREEDY. I won't.

(*BOUNSALL lifts PREEDY from the ground and swings him violently round. This is ad lib., but when LADY RUSHMERE enters, BOUNSALL is at the R. of hall door with PREEDY on L.*)

BOUNSALL. (*swinging him round*) Release me at once, Mr. Preedy, or I shall do you a violence.

PREEDY. I shall hold on till somebody comes.

(*LADY RUSHMERE enters from bedroom. Picture.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Good evening, Mr. Bounsall.

(*Slight pause. Both men laugh feebly, and break away.*)

Thought I heard a familiar voice, so I came out. Were you teaching Mr. Preedy a new waltz step?

BOUNSALL. (*uneasily*) Good evening, Lady Rushmere. (*goes to L. of table above chair*)

PREEDY. Mr. Bounsall had remembered an appointment. I was trying to persuade him to postpone it. (*at door*)

LADY RUSHMERE. (*at foot of settee*) Mr. Bounsall had an appointment with *me*—that is a good many hours overdue.

BOUNSALL. Preedy had better leave us.

(PREEDY *turns to go.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. He had better do nothing of the kind.

(PREEDY *stops.*)

Now, Mr. Bounsall.

BOUNSALL. Well, Lady Rushmere, (*coming to chair L. of table R.C.*) I must hasten to admit that my position is most awkward—quite painfully awkward—in fact, the tangle is so complex in its ramifications that I felt I could more easily disentangle it in writing—and I was leaving with that intention, but Preedy intercepted me, and——

LADY RUSHMERE. We don't seem to be getting on. Does Mr. Preedy know how matters stand?

BOUNSALL. Yes.

LADY RUSHMERE. How would it be if he were to have a try at it?

PREEDY. Oh, well—of course, if your ladyship wishes me to.

LADY RUSHMERE. I do.

BOUNSALL. Ah! That being so, I assume there is no necessity for me to remain. (*slight movement towards door as if to go*)

(PREEDY stands with his legs apart and his back to the door.)

LADY RUSHMERE. There is every necessity.
(sitting on settee) Now, Mr. Preedy.

(BOUNSALL goes to fire-place.)

PREEDY. (C.) Well, Mr. Bounsall tells me that he went to Nottingham and saw Mr.—er——

LADY RUSHMERE. The godfather?

PREEDY. The godfather, who was about to make his will—at least, one of his wills.

LADY RUSHMERE. One of his wills?

BOUNSALL. Two wills had been prepared, and——

PREEDY. Sh! Sh!

(BOUNSALL looks indignant.)

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes, I think we'll leave it to Mr. Preedy.

PREEDY. And one of these wills bequeathed the whole of an extensive property to Mr. Bounsall.

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes.

PREEDY. But the aged—especially when they are invalided—are apt to have their little fancies. Old Pott—er—Mr. Pottinger appears to have been no exception to the rule.

LADY RUSHMERE. What was his little fancy?

PREEDY. That Mr. Bounsall should—should marry his—I'm not sure if I fully understand the exact relationship, something in the nature of a step-daughter.

BOUNSALL. Mr. Pottinger's first wife's second daughter—by a former husband.

PREEDY. Sh! Sh! And that the marriage should take place then and there—at the bedside.

LADY RUSHMERE. And did it?

PREEDY. It apparently did. (*slight pause*)

LADY RUSHMERE. (*pause*) I see. Thank you, Mr. Preedy. (*rising*) You've made things quite clear to me.

BOUNSALL. Lady Rushmere, I trust you will hear me before you finally condemn. (*coming below table*)

LADY RUSHMERE. One moment.

(BOUNSALL *returns to fire-place.*)

(*to PREEDY*) Has Miss Sidgrave gone?

PREEDY. Not yet; she is in the drawing-room.

LADY RUSHMERE. Suppose you go to her. Mr. Bounsall and I had better have a word or two together, but I'll come to you in a very few minutes.

PREEDY. Certainly. (*going*) You do understand that, without your strongly expressed wish, I wouldn't have intervened for the world?

LADY RUSHMERE. I understand everything, and having heard the romantic story, I'm ashamed to have troubled you to tell me.

PREEDY. Oh, Lady Rushmere, don't mention trouble. I'm only too happy—that is to say, I'm not happy at all—(*with an apprehensive look at*

BOUNSALL) naturally. I think, if you'll excuse me, I will go to Miss Sidgrave.

LADY RUSHMERE. Do !

(PREEDY goes off into drawing-room. Slight pause.)

BOUNSALL. (again returning to below table) I hope in common fairness you will allow me to explain my position. I had fondly hoped we might, in time, be connected by a closer tie than mere friendship.

LADY RUSHMERE. That's a very unpleasant reminder.

BOUNSALL. In concluding this marriage there were certain pecuniary considerations involved, but they weighed very lightly in the balance ; it was entirely a matter of principle.

LADY RUSHMERE. I'm a poor hand at figures, but I fancy I can see where principle ended and interest began.

BOUNSALL. I can understand the cause of your anger.

LADY RUSHMERE. My dear Mr. Bounsall, that is exactly what you can't do. Why should I be annoyed with you ? You have apparently made an excellent matrimonial bargain, and behaved in accordance with your commercial instincts. We happened to come across each other when I'd had rather a rough time with Bob, and I thought I'd take on a moral, respectable middle-class man by way of a change, but these social blendings don't work—one might as well try to grow onions in an orchid

house, and therefore I have really no grievance against you. The person I'm on bad terms with at this moment is Joanna, Countess of Rushmere, for having made an exceptional fool of herself.

BOUNSALL. I suppose it is quite useless for me to make any further allusion to—Hertfordshire?

LADY RUSHMERE. Quite, thanks. You are probably anxious to return to your wife. Don't let me detain you. (*goes up c. above table to door R.*)

BOUNSALL. Lady Rushmere! (*following her up c.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Good-bye, Mr. Bounsall.

(*She goes into drawing-room.*)

(BOUNSALL *pauses a moment in thought, then takes a few steps towards settee, turns and is going up stage when BILSON comes in, followed by LORD KINSLOW (1), LORD RUSHMERE (2), and the HON. ROBERT JENNERWAY (3).*)

BILSON. (*at R. of door*) Lord Kinslow, Lord Rushmere, and Mr. Robert Jennerway.

(LORD RUSHMERE *has a large paper parcel under his arm. KINSLOW goes above table to fireplace.*)

LORD RUSHMERE. (*to BILSON*) I don't see Mr. Preedy. (*by chair at top of table*)

LORD KINSLOW. You informed us he was at home.

BILSON. He was here a few minutes ago.

LORD RUSHMERE. Where's the Heaven-forsaken

little beast put himself? In the pantry, I suppose.
(*seeing BOUNSALL*) Who's this?

(*JENNERWAY has entered slightly after the others.*
He places his hat on pedestal.)

JENNERWAY. (*recognizing BOUNSALL*) Hullo! hullo!—hullo! It's good old Bounsall! I say, Rush, this is Bounsall, the other cove's partner.

LORD RUSHMERE. You can get out—we'll ring).

(*BILSON goes out into pantry.*)

JENNERWAY. (*to BOUNSALL*) Dear old bird!

(*BOUNSALL is L.C. by settee, JENNERWAY on his R.*)
Great luck your being here. You don't know these chaps—what? This is Rushmere. Rush, put that blessed thing down and come and know Bounsall—who is quite one of the best.

LORD RUSHMERE. (*to BOUNSALL. He still has vase under his arm*) How are you? (*comes C.*) I broke a bit of your partner's crockery this morning, and this is to replace it—in the matter of outlay, I believe I've overshot the mark. (*putting vase on table—the upper end*)

BOUNSALL. Who is the other?

JENNERWAY. The venerable man's Lord Kinslow, my—in point of fact—father.

(*LORD KINSLOW nods. He is by the fire-place.*

RUSHMERE sits in chair at top of table, takes vase on his knees and commences undoing the parcel.)

BOUNSALL. How do you do, my lord?

LORD KINSLOW. You will probably realize our desire to escape from the present social and moral deadlock. (*sits R. of table*)

JENNERWAY. Now, about this Tweedy. (*sitting on settee*)

BOUNSALL. Preedy! (*at L. end of settee*)

JENNERWAY. Preedy, the chap seems to have brought some kind of influence to bear on Joanna—hypnotic. By George! that's a good word.

BOUNSALL. I am somewhat astonished to meet you here, Jennerway. I understood you had—had——

(NOTE.—*From this point until his exit, BOUNSALL is constantly endeavouring to get away, and evinces extreme annoyance each time he is prevented from escaping.*)

JENNERWAY. Oh, (*rising*) yes, that's all right, I had, but that was nothing. I'll tell you all about that.

BOUNSALL. I have really no wish to hear. I have an appointment and I fear I must be going. (*making movement*)

JENNERWAY. (*taking BOUNSALL by the right arm*) You ain't going, Bonny Boy, except over my recumbent corpse, because we've got a heap of use for you. I wanted a change, and I trotted off to the Pyramids, and of course there was somebody with me—celebrated dancer—met her in Vienna—but I soon found we couldn't keep step together. Beastly ungrateful

woman, with a sordid nature. (to BOUNSALL) You know the sort——

BOUNSALL. I do not know the sort. (*endeavouring to go to hall door*)

JENNERWAY. Oh no, of course. I'm always forgetting you're respectable.

LORD RUSHMERE. Push along with it, Bob. (*still busy with the vase*)

JENNERWAY. Yes ; well—this party and I had a final ding dong, and she went off with the courier, that's all about that. What bothered me was that I was at a loose end in the matter of coin. By extraordinary luck I met Charlie Blantyre. I say, Rush——

LORD RUSHMERE. (*places vase at head of table, rises and gazes at it*) You know, that vase is a bit too good ; I ought to have bought the cheaper one.

JENNERWAY. (c.) Oh, Lord, you might answer a simple question, not stand pottering there. Hullo ! Did you catch that ? Pottering—not bad—what ?

(KINSLOW *rises and goes slowly up stage by fire-place and eventually to hall door.*)

(to LORD RUSHMERE) You know Charlie Blantyre ?

LORD RUSHMERE. Yes, I do. What about him ?

JENNERWAY. Well, he's owed me a monkey for centuries, and in the noblest and most unexpected way he paid some of it back. When I arrived I

found all this kick-up between Jo and your friend Tweedy—Preedy. Now, if I could talk to her, and (*tapping BOUNSALL on the chest*) you could talk to him. If I don't smoke something I shall die. (*goes towards RUSHMERE*) Got a cigarette, Rush?

LORD RUSHMERE. No—if I had I should be smokin' it.

JENNERWAY. The guv'nor's a non-smoker. Oh, hang it!

LORD RUSHMERE. (*seeing cigarette box on side-board*) This looks like baccy. Preedy's, I suppose. (*places box and matches on table, and stands R. of table*)

JENNERWAY. Good old Preedy! (*sits L. of table*) Probably muck, but any port in a storm. I say, Rush, give me a light.

(JENNERWAY takes a cigarette, endeavours to strike match on match stand. He fails. Takes another match, strikes it on vase and lights cigarette. RUSHMERE indignantly removes vase, puts it under his arm and sits on club fender. By this time BOUNSALL has crept towards hall door, where he is intercepted by KINSLOW, who brings him down C. on his L.)

LORD KINSLOW. I can appreciate your hesitation, Mr. Bounsall, but Robert is obviously right in his assumption that your intervention would be invaluable, associated as you are with Mr. Preedy.

BOUNSALL. There are reasons which practically prohibit me from—— (*going down L.*)

JENNERWAY. No, they don't, you mustn't let 'em. (*rising and going L.C. to BOUNSALL*)

(*KINSLOW wanders up stage.*)

BOUNSALL. On the whole, and having carefully considered the present crisis, I should greatly prefer to withdraw.

JENNERWAY. Don't talk that asinine rot about withdrawing; be a bit sporting; and that reminds me about that little filly of yours, Crazy Jane.

(*RUSHMERE has risen and come below table, on which he places the vase, down stage and close to chair L. of table.*)

BOUNSALL. Really, I——

JENNERWAY. The weights are out for the Cambridgeshire, and with six stone seven she seems simply chucked in.

(*LORD RUSHMERE comes over to him.*)

LORD RUSHMERE. (*going R.C.*)

(*KINSLOW wanders back to fire-place. He is now R., RUSHMERE R.C., JENNERWAY C., BOUNSALL L.C.*)

I noticed that. May I ask on a short acquaintance, whether she's meant?

(*PREEDY comes out.*)

(*BOUNSALL, endeavouring to get away, goes up stage to middle of front of settee. JENNERWAY joins him and RUSHMERE goes up on JENNERWAY'S R.*)

BOUNSALL. I have not finally decided—and really at a moment like this——

PREEDY. Good evening, gentlemen! (*comes to chair L. of table R.C.*)

(*A moment's pause; they turn and look at him.*)

LORD RUSHMERE. Oh, you've turned up, have you? I say, Bob, this is him.

JENNERWAY. Is it, by George! Well, Rush, you'd better just let him know who I am, don't you think?

LORD RUSHMERE. (C.) Yes, I will in a minute, but the first and most important thing for Mr. Preedy to understand is, that I've replaced that bit of crockery I broke this morning.

OMNES. What!

LORD RUSHMERE. It's over there, sir. (*pointing to table*)

(*The positions at this point are:*)

KINSLOW.



PREEDY.

RUSHMERE.

JENNER

WAY.

BOUN SALL.

LORD RUSHMERE. Now then, Mr. Preedy; this is Mr. Robert Jennerway—Lady Rushmere's husband.

(PREEDY bows. JENNERWAY nods genially.)

(*gives JENNERWAY an admonishing look*) Lady Rushmere's deeply injured husband. (*goes to top end of settee*)

JENNERWAY. What? Of course you're quite

right—deeply injured—hadnt struck me? (*crossing to PREEDY*) Confound it, Mr.—er—man! What the devil's all this about?

PREEDY. All what about, Mr. Jennerway?
(*seated L. of table*)

JENNERWAY. Why, luring the Countess of Rushmere—my—in point of fact—wife, from the path of—thingummy. (*turning to LORD RUSHMERE.*) What?

LORD RUSHMERE. That's the way to put it.
(*up L.C. by top end of settee*)

(*KINSLOW is seated R. of table.*)

JENNERWAY. If I didn't suffer with a shaky hand—which has got rather worse lately—I'd have conveyed you over to Belgium and potted you like a partridge.

(*KINSLOW raises hand in reproach.*)

PREEDY. Belgium? I understood, Mr. Jennerway, your travels were more in the direction of Egypt.

JENNERWAY. You leave Egypt alone. Egypt ain't included in your map—we've been talking it over with dear old Bonny Bounsall.

PREEDY. Ah, quite so. I see you haven't gone yet, Mr. Bounsall.

BOUNSALL. (L.) No, Preedy—ahem!—I—have not. I was most unwilling to intrude, but—

LORD KINSLOW. We begged Mr. Bounsall to remain.

JENNERWAY. We couldn't spare you, Bonny Boykin, could we? (*moves to LORD RUSHMERE, and they talk apart*)

BOUNSALL. I felt hopeful in fact, confident—you would listen to reason. (*winking at PREEDY*)

PREEDY. I shall be most happy to listen to reason; up to now I've only listened to Mr. Jennerway.

JENNERWAY. (*looking round, to LORD RUSHMERE*) What's the notion of that? Cheek?

PREEDY. I resent the necessity for any kind of discussion with a person of Mr. Jennerway's low moral character.

(*All staggered.*)

JENNERWAY. (*going over to PREEDY*) My moral character! Have you never heard the familiar saying about the pot and the kettle?

PREEDY. That flippant rejoinder simply passes me by.

JENNERWAY. Oh, does it? Now, look here, (*going to PREEDY*) my little commercial friend, what we've got to arrive at is what's going to be done. We can dismiss the sunny shores of Belgium—— Oh, Lord, I never met such beastly baccy as you smoke in all my life. (*goes behind PREEDY to top of table and puts cigarette in ash-tray.*)

BOUNSALL. May we not hope that the best solution lies in the direction of conciliation? (*at foot of settee*)

JENNERWAY. Good old Bounsall! Conciliation!
(*is c.*) Of course, that's it!

(BOUNSALL goes up at back of settee and sits in chair by table L.)

Now, it seems to me, Mr. Preedy, that you and my late Viennese friend balance one another; she's gone off with the courier, and if you will revert—good word—to the respectability for which nature clearly intended you, that would leave Joanna and myself free to declare a draw, and we can all go back to—er——

LORD KINSLOW. The status quo ante.

JENNERWAY. I don't know what the guv'nor means, but I've no doubt he's right. (*saying this to BOUNSALL*)

(RUSHMERE has by this time crossed to top of table R.)
(*Slight pause.*)

PREEDY. (*rising*) Mr. Jennerway, you have addressed your proposal to me, but Lady Rushmere is the only person who can answer it. (*glancing at BOUNSALL*) I will ask her to come to you.

(BOUNSALL rises and comes down L. behind settee.)
(*going up stage*) And it will be for her to decide whether she prefers the fire to the frying-pan.

(PREEDY goes into the drawing-room.)

JENNERWAY. Well, he's right, I think; we must talk to Joanna.

BOUNSALL. Quite so. And now that the matter has reached its present happy stage, I really must insist on withdrawing. (*moving to go*)

(BOUNSALL endeavours to go to hall door. KINSLOW, RUSHMERE and JENNERWAY prevent him. RUSHMERE and JENNERWAY back up stage with RUSHMERE on JENNERWAY'S R. KINSLOW comes below and up C. All crowd round BOUNSALL, who is pushing his way through them as LADY RUSHMERE enters and comes to top of chair L. of table at "Quite a pleasant family gathering." All men turn. Picture. RUSHMERE and KINSLOW go above table, JENNERWAY crosses to LADY RUSHMERE, BOUNSALL comes down behind settee to L.)

JENNERWAY. That be damned—what?

BOUNSALL. In the interest of delicacy, Jennerway—

JENNERWAY. That's simply piffle, gentle floweret.

BOUNSALL. Lady Rushmere will be here in a moment; it would be painful for her as well as for me.

JENNERWAY. But you've met Jo—she won't mind you.

(LADY RUSHMERE comes in.)

LORD RUSHMERE. Better see it through, don't you think?

LORD KINSLOW. (to BOUNSALL) Let me add my entreaties.

JENNERWAY. We've got you, and we're going to stick to you.

BOUNSALL. Really, I—

LADY RUSHMERE. Quite a pleasant family gathering.

JENNERWAY. Hullo ! hullo ! hullo !

LADY RUSHMERE. Good evening, Bob.

JENNERWAY. You see before you a penitent man.

(PREEDY enters and comes down by fire-place to foot of table.)

LADY RUSHMERE. Be a little careful with the penitence, because you're not used to it. Mr. Bounsall still here ! That's rather an unexpected pleasure.

BOUNSALL. Under pressure, I assure you, Lady Rushmere—I was most anxious to go.

LADY RUSHMERE. I can quite understand that.
(KINSLOW sits at top end of fender. RUSHMERE above him by the sideboard.)

LORD KINSLOW. We all persuaded Mr. Bounsall to remain.

JENNERWAY. Oh yes, we couldn't spare dear old sunny-hearted Bounsall. Well, Jo, I'll deal with myself later—I can explain all that. I say, old girl, you've been kicking your heels to a right merry tune—what ? But there's nothing of that nigger chap about me—what's his name ? Othello—and I think Preedy will admit that all things considered, I've let him off pretty easy.

LADY RUSHMERE. Let Mr. Preedy off ? That was very good of you. Now it's about time you heard the truth. (sits L. of table)

BOUNSALL. I will ask you all to excuse me. (makes movement to go)

LADY RUSHMERE. Since you persuaded Mr. Boun-

sall to stop, I think you'd better keep him a bit longer ; he's rather prominent in my story.

JENNERWAY. What, good old bonny Bounsall ?
(C.)

(BOUNSALL *sits on settee.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes, as you put it, good old bonny Bounsall. He was on the look out for some lady with a title, who was young and silly enough, or old and silly enough, to listen to him, and he met me and proposed that we should bolt.

JENNERWAY. What ?

(*General astonishment.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. This was to be a brand new kind of elopement, not like one of yours. (to JENNERWAY) It was to be thoroughly moral and proper in every way.

[RUSHMERE.
KINSLOW.



JENNERWAY.
LADY RUSHMERE.

BOUNS ALL.

PREEDY,

JENNERWAY. What a damned ruffian !

LADY RUSHMERE. We were to motor to his aunt's in Hertfordshire. Mr. Bounsall's name wasn't to be mentioned, so nobody's linen would have to go to the public laundry, except yours.

JENNERWAY. Well, upon my soul ! What ?

LADY RUSHMERE. We started, and got as far as

town; we stopped here for a bait on the way, and then Mr. Bounsall suddenly developed a sick godfather in the country. He went off, and so far as I can understand, married some one else in the middle of the night. That's by the way. (*to JENNERWAY*) But I want to direct your attention to Mr. Preedy, on to whose back I was chucked like a sack of coals.

PREEDY. Oh, Lady Rushmere!

LADY RUSHMERE. And it's lucky for you, Bob, and still more lucky for me, that Mr. Preedy happened to be Mr. Preedy. He bucked up under the weight of me, saw to my comfort, handed me over his flat and his bed, and trotted out to an hotel in the middle of a wet night like a thorough sportsman. And as he had promised Mr. Bounsall to keep his secret, he never gave the show away. And now (*rises, turning to JENNERWAY*) I think it's about time you went down on those shaky knees of yours and asked Mr. Preedy's pardon.

JENNERWAY. My dear Jo, I'd do it like a shot, but what I'd rather do would be to shake him by the hand—(*crossing to PREEDY*)

(LADY RUSHMERE *comes c.*)

—if Mr. Preedy will so far honour me, and tell him I think he's the biggest man in England.

PREEDY. (*shaking hands with him*) That's a compliment I hardly expected, Mr. Jennerway. (*goes up between fire-place and table to RUSHMERE, who goes R. of hall door*)

LADY RUSHMERE. And now perhaps Mr. Bounsall needn't wait. (*goes to settee and sits*)

(KINSLOW *is by the head of fire-place.*)

JENNERWAY. Needn't wait. (*crossing and following BOUNSALL, who goes up L. behind settee to hall door*) By George! he'd better not. Confound it, sir! All the time you were a snake in the grass—quite the cobra—what?

LORD RUSHMERE. (*R. of hall door with PREEDY on his R.*) Then it's the other waster who's been taking up our time.

(BOUNSALL *is at hall door. JENNERWAY is on his L. and RUSHMERE on his R.*)

BOUNSALL. I can only say I have acted throughout from the highest motives. (*he waves his hands as if to dismiss them all. In doing this he hits JENNERWAY on the chest and nearly hits RUSHMERE, who backs on to PREEDY*)

(*He goes out. They all look after him.*)

(RUSHMERE and LADY RUSHMERE go to settee. *She sits. RUSHMERE is by her. PREEDY comes C.*)

JENNERWAY. That's a nice kind of man!

(JENNERWAY crosses and sits L. of table. KINSLOW comes down to R. of table. JENNERWAY in speaking to KINSLOW becomes emphatic and stretches his right arm across the table and close to and above vase. At "An unspeakable tyke" he turns as if to address

LADY RUSHMERE *and* RUSHMERE *and inadvertently knocks the vase from the table.*)

Upon my life ! when one sees the true nature of the brute, it makes one positively regret the outstanding trifles of borrowed money there is still between us. I'll tot it up—and I'm not at all sure, sir, (*to LORD KINSLOW*) that it wouldn't be judicious of you to send him a cheque—in the whole course of my life I never remember encountering such an unspeakable tyke. (*knocks over vase, which breaks*) Hullo ! hullo ! Little accident, I'm afraid.

LORD RUSHMERE. (*highly indignant*) Accident ! What a damned clumsy idiot you are, Bob ! (*L.C.*)

(*JENNERWAY at foot of chair L. of table.*)

PREEDY. It really doesn't signify. (*coming C.*)

LORD RUSHMERE. Doesn't signify ! I shouldn't have mentioned the 'price, Mr. Preedy, but the ass has pulverized fifteen guineas.

JENNERWAY. We can replace it. (*R.C.*)

LORD RUSHMERE. Replace be damned ! I've done my share of replacing. (*goes up C.*)

JENNERWAY. My dear Rush, when I said we can replace it, the person I had chiefly in mind was my—er—respected father.

LORD KINSLOW. Fifteen guineas ! Oh, no !—Oh, no ! (*down R.*)

PREEDY. (*on his knees picking up pieces*) If I may suggest—not in a spirit of advertisement—we

are bringing out a new patent cement that really has excellent results.

JENNERWAY. Cement! (*carefully stepping over PREEDY'S legs*) That's the best idea we've had yet, and you must really permit me to pay for it—what? Oh, no, damn it! I insist! (*he crosses over to LADY RUSHMERE*)

(*RUSHMERE pats PREEDY, who has risen and gone to R. of table. KINSLOW has taken hearth-brush and swept some of the broken pieces under table on back. He takes pieces of vase up stage. RUSHMERE pours himself out a whisky and soda, also pours out one for KINSLOW and PREEDY. They drink by settee up R.*)

Now, look here, Jo, we ain't going to quarrel, are we? I assure you I've shaken off all my—er—Egyptian bonds—rather neat—what? And if I've put a little money on a female outsider now and then, at the finish you're always at the top of the betting.

LADY RUSHMERE. All right. I suppose we must have another try, and we may worry through.

JENNERWAY. Bless you! (*risés*)

LADY RUSHMERE. By the way, have you got the price of a night's lodging?

JENNERWAY. As it happens, I'm rather coiný at the moment. Charlie Blantyre paid me the front paws of a monkey.

(*HARRIET enters from bedroom.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. Good old Charlie! Let's go to

the *Savoy*. (to HARRIET, who is L. of settee) Bring me my cloak in about five minutes.

(HARRIET goes.)

JENNERWAY. New maid?

LADY RUSHMERE. Yes!

JENNERWAY. Ah! looks useful.

(BILSON enters from hall, followed by SIDGRAVE, MRS.

SIDGRAVE and SAUNDERS.)

BILSON. Mr. and Mrs. Sidgrave, and Mr. Saunders.

PREEDY. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!

(PREEDY moves below table R.C. JENNERWAY to back of settee and down L.)

(MR. SIDGRAVE comes in, followed by MRS. SIDGRAVE, and SAUNDERS brings up the rear.)

SAUNDERS.

MRS. SIDGRAVE.

RUSHMERE.

LADY RUSHMERE.
JENNERWAY.

KINSLOW.



SIDGRAVE.

PREEDY

SIDGRAVE. Hamilton, a terrible story has reached my ears. Where is my child?

PREEDY. Oh, Emma is in the drawing-room.

MRS. SIDGRAVE. Without a proper chaperone?

LADY RUSHMERE. That isn't so. Miss Sidgrave's been spending the evening with me.

MRS. SIDGRAVE. Who is this?

SAUNDERS. You may well ask; but you'd better not know.

PREEDY. Allow me to introduce you to my friends. The Countess of Rushmere,

(She rises leisurely.)

and her husband, the Hon. Robert Jennerway.

(They are both startled. MR. and MRS. SIDGRAVE bow.)

Lord Kinslow—the Earl of Rushmere.

(MR. and MRS. SIDGRAVE bow.)

SAUNDERS. Yes, and those gentlemen were trying to dissuade this lady to discontinue her disgraceful relations with Mr. Preedy—I overheard them.

PREEDY. Mr. Saunders misunderstood the whole affair.

SAUNDERS. Will her ladyship deny that deserted by her husband she had taken up her abode with Mr. Preedy?

LADY RUSHMERE. My husband was abroad.

ALL. Abroad!

LADY RUSHMERE. And only returned this evening. *(to JENNERWAY)* Back him up. *(sits on settee)*

JENNERWAY. *(coming slightly L.C.)* The account of my movements is curiously accurate. I couldn't get here before, tidal train was late, and all that sort of thing, but I felt perfectly happy because I knew my wife was being looked after by my very dear old friend, Tweedy—Preedy. *(goes below settee to back of it)*

SIDGRAVE. Reginald Saunders, your conduct can only be traceable to imbecility or intemperance. I fear the latter. You had better retire, sir.

SAUNDERS. I will. I leave behind me a mixed company of knaves and fools. You can sort yourselves at your leisure.

(There is a general movement on the part of all the men.

SAUNDERS *is by door* L.C. RUSHMERE *(above table R.C.) goes to him.* JENNERWAY *makes slight movement, as does also* KINSLOW. PREEDY *goes from below table R.C. to SAUNDERS up C.)*

SAUNDERS. Don't you dare to lay a finger on me!

PREEDY. *(to SAUNDERS)* I've done it before!

SAUNDERS. Don't you dare!

(Exit.) (At SAUNDERS' exit PREEDY exits into drawing-room.)

(MRS. SIDGRAVE is at top of table R. centre, SIDGRAVE also at top of table on her R. JENNERWAY is behind the settee. RUSHMERE is up by R. of hall door. KINSLOW bows to the SIDGRAVES and goes C. below table. SIDGRAVES bow.)

LORD KINSLOW. Good-bye, Joanna, and Robert, I suppose we shall hear from you?

JENNERWAY. Quite sure to, sir.

LADY RUSHMERE. The monkey's only a marmoset.

(LORD KINSLOW and LORD RUSHMERE go off through hall door.)

(PREEDY returns with EMMA. MRS. SIDGRAVE is at

*top of table. EMMA comes above chair L. of table.
PREEDY talks to SIDGRAVE.)*

JENNERWAY. Hullo! Hullo! That's a useful girl! (*coming above settee to C. ogling EMMA*)

LADY RUSHMERE. You go and get a taxi.

(*HARRIET comes out from bedroom with cloak, helps
LADY RUSHMERE, who rises, on with it, and returns
to the bedroom*)

JENNERWAY. With unspeakable delight!

LADY RUSHMERE. What are you messing about for?

JENNERWAY. (*potters about*) I could have sworn I came here in a hat. (*finds it on pedestal.*) All right, I've got it. (*to the SIDGRAVES, but all the time glancing admiringly at EMMA*) Good-bye!

(*JENNERWAY exits through hall door.*)

(*Curtain warning.*)

LADY RUSHMERE. (*to EMMA*) When is the wedding to be?

(*EMMA goes to LADY RUSHMERE L.C. PREEDY has come to R. of hall door.*)

You must drop me a line. Good-bye, dear. (*kisses her and then crosses to PREEDY C.*)

(*EMMA sits on settee.*)

Well, dear friend, it is only left for you and me to wish each other luck.

(MR. and MRS. SIDGRAVE are talking together above table)

R.C.)

Your luck is waiting for you on the settee; mine is probably tumbling down the stone staircase.

PREEDY. Fortune has certainly been most kind to me, because a great lady has just addressed me as her dear friend.

LADY RUSHMERE. I'm apt to speak as I find. (as she goes up she half turns to the SIDGRAVES) Good-bye!

MRS. SIDGRAVE and SIDGRAVE. Good-bye, your ladyship.

PREEDY. (following her up) You must allow me to see you down.

LADY RUSHMERE. You stay where you're wanted—on the settee. Good-bye! (shaking hands with PREEDY)

PREEDY. Good-bye!

(She goes out.)

Charming woman her ladyship. (coming down c.)

(MRS. SIDGRAVE sits left of table.)

MRS. SIDGRAVE. (to PREEDY) You've known her for quite a long time?

PREEDY. Oh quite—quite a long time; we're very old friends.

MRS. SIDGRAVE. Well now, how about to-morrow, Hamilton?

PREEDY. (going to and sitting by EMMA, on her R.) I might manage the Imperial Institute and the

Natural History Museum to-morrow. I deserve a little reckless dissipation.

(There is a general murmur of conversation as the curtain falls.)

CURTAIN.



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